The Robinson-Hayes Critique of Nāgārjuna's Reasoning

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Richard H. Robinson

Did Nāgārjuna really refute all philosophical views?

The treatment Mādhyamika has received from its ancient opponents and modern discussants is, in one respect, as peculiar as the way in which it handled the views against which its criticisms were directed. Far from admitting that they must either refute the Mādhyamika objections or concede defeat, most classical systems either ignored Nāgārjuna's incisive and forceful attacks, or contented themselves with answering one or two specific objections, or tried rather ineptly to discredit the Mādhyamika method of refutation. Unsympathetic modern writers such as A. B. Keith have remarked briefly and categorically that this method is sophistic, but have not attempted to demonstrate their charge in detail. Sympathetic authorities such as T. R. V. Murti have shown clearly and concretely how this destructive dialectic works, but have not subjected to a searching examination its claim to demolish all constructive philosophical views (*dṛṣṭi*). If this claim is sound, it will be in order to examine why those philosophies to which it has been applied have not considered themselves refuted. Even if the Mādhyamika claim is false and its methods sophistic, philosophy stands to gain from discovering precisely how this form of sophistry works, and why it seems so formally convincing even while arousing suspicion in the observer.

In American country fairs there used to be a well-known game played with three walnut half-shells and one pea. The operator first held up all three shells for the audience to see. Then he turned all three upside down, placed the pea under one shell, and proceeded to shuffle the shells. When he stopped, a member of the audience would try to guess which shell the pea was under. Nāgārjuna's system resembles the shell game in several ways. Its elements are few and its operations are simple, though performed at lightning speed and with great dexterity. And the very fact that he cannot quite follow each move reinforces the observer's conviction that there is a trick somewhere. The objective of this article is to identify the trick and to determine on some points whether or not it is legitimate.

Nāgārjuna has a standard mechanism for refutation, the pattern of which may be abstracted as follows: You say that C relates A and B. A and B must be either completely identical or completely different. If they are completely identical, C cannot obtain, because it is transitive and requires two terms. If they are completely different C cannot obtain, because two things that are completely different can have no common ground and so cannot be related. Therefore it is false that C obtains between A and B.

Several features of this formula excite immediate suspicion. That it can be applied so readily to almost any thesis suggests affinity with a number of well-known sophistic tricks. That it relies on dichotomy calls for caution, since false dichotomies are so easy to make and are so frequent in philosophizing. And that it seems to contradict common sense ought to arouse distrust, since even in philosophy common sense statements that seem true are not rejected until

disproved. But before we give way to offhand disbelief, it is proper to note the definitions and presuppositions that underlie this formula and render it more plausible.

The first key term is own-being (*svabhāva*), which is defined as unmade and not dependent on another (*Mādhyamika-Kārikās* 15.2) ; it is that of which otherwise-being (or change) never occurs (*MK* 15.8). It does not have another as its condition, it is calm, is not manifested discursively, is nonconceptual, and has no diversity (*MK* 18.9).

Emptiness (*śūnyatā*) is defined as equivalent to dependent coarising (*MK* 24.18). It equals absence of own-being. All entities (*bhāva*) are dependently coarisen (*MK* 24.19).

Own-being is defined as nondependent, so own-being cannot arise and so does not exist. It follows that all entities are empty and have no own-being. This is the sole thesis that Nāgārjuna wishes to prove. He asserts that when emptiness holds good all the Buddha's teachings hold good, and that when emptiness does not hold good, nothing is valid (*MK* 24.18).

The insistence in the refutation formula that A and B must be completely identical or different, rather than partly identical, follows from the definition of *svabhāva* as not dependent on another. Qualifications such as "some" and "partly" are excluded because the discussion is concerned not with the denial or affirmation of commonsense assertions such as "some fuel is burning and some is not," but with the concepts of own-being and essence. What pertains to part of an essence must pertain to the whole essence. A defining property is either essential or nonessential. If it is nonessential it is not really a defining property of an essence. If it is essential, then the essence can never be devoid of the property.

This set of definitions is clear and consistent. Wherever one of the terms can be applied, the others will follow and refutation occurs. This is not really mysterious, since *svabhāva* is by definition self-contradictory. If it exists, it must belong to an existent entity, that is, it must be conditioned, dependent on other entities, and possessed of causes. But by definition it is free from conditions, nondependent on others, and not caused. Therefore, it is absurd to maintain that a *svabhāva* exists.

The validity of Nāgārjuna's refutations hinges upon whether his opponents really upheld the existence of a *svabhāva* or *svabhāva* as he defines the term. Those who uphold the existence of a *svabhāva* are clearly self-contradictory. The possibility remains, however, that any one of the classical *darśanas* could purge itself of the self-contradictory *svabhāva* concept and become as unobjectionable as the *Buddha-vacana* which Nāgārjuna accepts as legitimate. If, on the other hand, some non-Buddhist theories turn out not to be guilty of holding the *svabhāva* concept in the form Nāgārjuna defines, then his critique will find no mark, and his dialectic will fail to destroy some constructive philosophy.

A further possibility is that Nāgārjuna's critique, when applied, would fail to damage certain modern metaphysical systems that dispense with the category of essence. A good proportion of the axioms that he presupposes are not considered necessary or even acceptable by many European philosophers. Of course a neo-Mādhyamika might try to adapt the old technique to the presuppositions of the new philosophies, but the success of this attempt could not be assumed before hand. For the present, let us just examine the adequacy of Nāgārjuna's accommodation to the presuppositions of his classical antagonists.

We can concede immediately the soundness of Nāgārjuna's defense of his *prasaṅga* method (in the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*). Denial that an entity exists does not imply that its opposite exists. That the words and statements in the refutation are empty does not deprive them of validity. The debater who seeks only to expose self-contradictions in his opponent's arguments need not make any affirmative statements about what exists. He may assume his opponent's axioms for the sake of argument without committing himself to his opponent's truth. But if he uses an axiom or a rule that is not accepted by his opponent, then his argument is disqualified.

Does Nāgārjuna succeed in refuting all views without making any assumptions that are not conceded by the adherents of the particular view under attack? We can list some axioms upon which his arguments depend, and then go on to inquire how widely others accepted them.

(1) Whatever has extension is divisible, hence is composite, not permanent and not real.

(1a) Corollary: An indivisible, infinitesimal thing could have no extension.

(2) To exist means to be arisen; hence existence is synonymous with manifestation, and there is no unmanifested existence.

(3) A real thing would have to be an utterly simple individual which contains no diversity. If it had diversity, it would have extension and therefore would not be indivisible and real.

(4) The perception of arising and ceasing is illusory (*MK* 21.11, 17.31–33, 7.34).

(5) Only transitive actions and relations are admissible; reflexive actions are disallowed (the eye cannot see itself) (*MK* 3.2), the fingertip cannot touch itself, etc.), and seemingly intransitive expressions such as "the goer goes" must be recast in transitive form as "the goer goes a distance."

(6) The Buddhas teach truly that two truths or levels of being are to be distinguished, the mundane-conventional (*lokasamvṛti*) and the absolute (*paramārtha*) (*MK* 24.8).

Axiom 1 disagrees with the consensus of all schools, including the *śūnyavāda*

of the *sūtras*, that *ākāśa* is ubiquitous and indivisible. Thus there is at least one entity that is not composite, has extension, and is permanent. Nāgārjuna's attempt to demolish the concept of *ākāśa* (*MK* chap. 8) selects the relation of *ākāśa* to its *lakṣaṇa* as the vulnerable point. But as we will see later, his denial of the entity-attribute relation presupposes his denial of extension and is not admissible until after he has disproved the commonly accepted thesis that *ākāśa* is extended and indivisible.

If it is admitted that there is one extended, permanent and noncomposite entity, then it is not absurd to hold that there are others. And if extension is admitted, then duration must be admitted, too, since the arguments against duration involve the same operations of segmentation as those against extension. What the example of *ākāśa* does not render admissible, however, is diversity within an extended substance. Diversity was commonly considered to belong to the objects that occupied space and occurred in time.

Axiom 2 stands in contradiction to another axiom accepted by all schools and even invoked by Nāgārjuna himself: that the real is that which has never arisen (has no cause), and hence has no beginning or end, is permanent. One must choose between these two axioms. If reality means becoming, then that which is empty is real, that which is real is empty. But if reality means nonbecoming, then either there is nothing real (a rather pointless inversion of the ordinary meaning of the word "real"), or there is a plane of being which is free from becoming. Nāgārjuna is not alone among the thinkers of classical India in promiscuously adhering now to one and later to another of these axioms.

Axiom 3 is simply not accepted by the *pariṇāmavādins*—Īśvarakṛṣṇa and Rāmānuja, for example. In classical Sāṁkhya, *prakṛti* has the three *guṇas*, hence has diversity as an intrinsic property (*SK* 11). The gravest difficulty with this position is that there is no ready commonsense example of a variegated and nondivisible entity; apparent examples turn out to be composite. But if lack of a commonsense example militates against diversity-within-unity, Nāgārjuna's Axiom 4 is even more vulnerable on this score. His ostensible examples—a hallucination (*māyā*), a dream, a mirage—are all instances that common sense can establish illusions. Nāgārjuna gives no commonsense perceptual criterion for considering all phenomena as *māyā*. He does not examine perception empirically, does not attempt to show that the senses are bad witnesses in all cases, and merely asserts dogmatically that perception is marked by *vikalpa* (conceptualization), which falsifies. This is an empirical proposition, be it noted, and Nāgārjuna's claim is that he does not make empirical assertions apart from those conceded by his opponents. He ought to admit either that he maintains *māyāvāda* on the authority of the *śūnyavādin sūtras*, which are not *āgama* for the Hīnayānist opponents or for the *āstikas*, or that he requires an empirically derived theory of error in order

to exclude empirical arguments from the rest of his dialectic. If he adduces the experience of the Buddhist contemplatives (which he does only obliquely in the *Kārikās*, but which the commentators do explicitly), he is not making an empirical assertion but making one that his opponents are not prepared to concede. Non-Buddhists are not going to accept that the Buddhist *āryas* are authorities, and other Buddhists do not take the experience of the *āryas* as evidence for *śūnyavāda*. There appears to be no way of forcing a realist opponent to concede that commonsense experience is erroneous except to examine experience and to demonstrate empirically that it is delusive. Merely citing well-known varieties of illusion does not prove the point.

Axiom 5 seems sounder than it actually is because the examples are so graphic. It really presupposes Axiom 1. If an entity possesses extension, then one region of it can act upon or relate to another region of it. This is the commonest sense of reflexive expressions. Nāgārjuna, incidentally, is guilty of a sheer quibble when he says that since the eye cannot see itself it cannot see another (*MK* 3.2). This is not seriously detrimental to his case, which can quite easily be restated without the quibble. But more serious is his failure either to accept or to disqualify the instances of genuine intransitive action that occur in commonsense experience plus the metaphysical ones that are affirmed by some of his opponents. When he denies that the lamp illuminates itself (*MK* 7.8), he is simply arbitrarily choosing to consider the reflexive object as if it were a nonreflexive object. He is refusing to allow, as ordinary language does, that reflexive statements are either pseudo-reflexive or pseudo-transitive. "I saw myself in the mirror" and "I scratched myself" are pseudo-reflexives. "Light illuminates itself" and "Water makes itself wet" are pseudo-transitives, better expressed by "Light is inherently bright" and "Water is inherently wet."

This brings us to Nāgārjuna's treatment of the relation between entity and attribute. It has already been mentioned that if extension were granted to entities then attributes might belong to them, but that since Nāgārjuna denies extension he denies the attributive relation. According to Axiom 3, a real thing must be utterly simple; it cannot have more than one property. But if it has even one property, then it consists of two entities—itself and its property—which is incompatible with Axiom 3. The weakness here is that none of Nāgārjuna's opponents really adhered to Axiom 3. The realists' infinitesimals were not utterly without extension and permitted each simple to have one attribute.

An allied but distinct argument against the entity-attribute relation charges that it involves vicious infinite regress. If A is the attribute, B is the entity, and C is the relation between them, then there must be another relation D which relates C to A, another relation E which relates C to B, other relations F and G which relate E to its relata, and so on ad infinitum. Nāgārjuna employs this

argument against the properties (*lakṣaṇa*) of the momentary *dharmas* of the Ābhidharmikas—arising, abiding, and ceasing. He says that there would have to be an arising of arising, and an arising of the arising of arising, and so on infinitely (*MK* 7.3).[1] The Ābhidharmikas simply did not accept the charge. The *Abhidharmahṛdaya* (Chinese *a-p'i-t'an-hsin-lun, Taishō* 1550, 811b20ff.), reports the objection and replies that the operation is reflexive and reciprocal; each *dharma* effects itself and each of the seven others. For example, arising (a) arises of itself, and (b) constitutes the arising of abiding, disintegration, and ceasing and of the four *anulakṣaṇas*. This implies Ābhidharmikas acceptance of complex entities with multiple functions, and rejection of Nāgārjuna's axiom.

An important example of an intransitive function is the *svaprakāśa* of Advaita Vedānta. This tenet has been skillfully and extensively defended against heterodox interpretations, and certainly suffices to show that Nāgārjuna's critique does not damage the Advaita Vedāntic position on this point.

Thus it appears that the systems under attack commonly defended themselves by affirming a reflexive, nontransitive or reciprocal operation which obviated vicious infinite regression. The weakness in the defense lies in its arbitrary selection of one, rather than other, place in which to posit nontransitivity.

Axiom 5 concerns the arbitrary introduction of pseudo-subjects and pseudo-objects. This operation is permitted and even encouraged by grammatical conventions in English and Sanskrit. The event which can be reported adequately with the single finite verb "rains" is more usually furnished with a dummy subject "it." Thus we may say "It rains" or "Rain rains," and adding a dummy object in reply to the dubious question "What does rain rain?" we may say "Rain rains rain." That the subject and object are dummies is shown by the fact that rain never does anything but rain, and nothing but rain is ever rained in the primary sense of the verb (excluding the other meaning, as in "Flowers rained down"). English "rain" is ambivalently transitive and intransitive, thus permitting the addition of dummy objects. The option of adding such objects, though, is not a sufficient warrant for transforming all statements to this form, and then treating the objects as if they were not dummies.

Axiom 6 is dogmatic and serves little purpose in the destructive dialectic. The distinction is not admitted by non-Buddhists, as *Candrakīrti* points out (*MKV* 27.1), and so the Mādhyamika is forced either to refute Sāṁkhya, for instance, from just one viewpoint, which is irrelevant to the opponent, or from both viewpoints, which is cumbrous for the proponent and irrelevant for the

[1] See Karl H. Potter, *Presuppositions of India's Philosophies* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), pp. 82–83, for a clear account of *anavasthā*.

antagonist. This axiom is enunciated in Chapter 24 of the *Kārikās* where Nāgārjuna is explaining why he cannot be charged with denying all the Buddha's teachings. The opponent here is a Hīnayānist who accepts the authority of the *Āgamas* or *Nikāyas* but certainly would not accept as *Buddha-vacana* the *śūnyavādin sūtras* in which Nāgārjuna's doctrine of the two truths is stated. Hence Nāgārjuna departs from his avowed method, makes an existential statement about an exegetical principle, and bases his argument on an axiom not acceptable to his opponent.

The nature of the Mādhyamika trick is now quite clear. It consists of (a) reading into the opponent's views a few terms which one defines for him in a self-contradictory way, and (b) insisting on a small set of axioms which are at variance with common sense and not accepted in their entirety by any known philosophy. It needs no insistence to emphasize that the application of such a critique does not demonstrate the inadequacy of reason and experience to provide intelligible answers to the usual philosophical questions.

This critique of Nāgārjuna's critique does demonstrate, however, that critical self-examination is fruitful for philosophy. A similar examination of the axioms and definitions of the other classical *darśanas* would reveal that each depends on a set of arbitrary axioms and hence does not arrive at any non-experiential propositions which all reasonable men must accept. More cogent than Nāgārjuna's criticism of constructive philosophy is that which T.R.V. Murti makes under Nāgārjuna's banner: "By its defective procedure dogmatic metaphysics wrongly understands the transcendent in terms of the empirical modes; it illegitimately extends, to the unconditioned, the categories of thought that are true within phenomena alone."[2]

I may add that dogmatic metaphysics, like the Mādhyamika critique, usually fails to do justice to the categories of thought we commonly employ in thinking about the phenomenal realm. This observable fact furnishes some justification for the Savage in Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World,* who extracted from Hamlet's passing remark the definition: "A philosopher is someone who thinks of fewer things than there are in heaven and earth."

[2] T.R.V. Murti, *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1955), p. 332.

RICHARD P. HAYES

NĀGĀRJUNA'S APPEAL

1. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Among the incidental features of Nāgārjuna's philosophy that have captured my attention over the years, there are two in particular that I wish to discuss in this paper.[1] The first observation is that his philosophical writings seem to have fascinated a large number of modern scholars of Buddhism; this hardly requires demonstration. The second observation is that Nāgārjuna's writings had relatively little effect on the course of subsequent Indian Buddhist philosophy. Despite his apparent attempts to discredit some of the most fundamental concepts of abhidharma, abhidharma continued to flourish for centuries, without any appreciable attempt on the part of ābhidharmikas to defend their methods of analysis against Nāgārjuna's criticisms.[2] And despite Nāgārjuna's radical critique of the very possibility of having grounded knowledge (*pramāṇa*), the epistemological school of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti dominated Indian Buddhist intellectual circles, again without any explicit attempt to answer Nāgārjuna's criticisms of their agenda. Aside from a few commentators on Nāgārjuna's works, who identified themselves as Mādhyamikas, Indian Buddhist intellectual life continued almost as if Nāgārjuna had never existed.

Taken together, these two observations may suggest that the interest that modern scholars of Buddhism have in Nāgārjuna may be out of proportion to the influence that Nāgārjuna had on Buddhist themselves. On first consideration, the observation that Nāgārjuna had little impact on classical Buddhists may seem unrelated to the observation that he has had a good deal of impact on modern Buddhologists. On further reflection, however, it seems that a common reason can be found to explain these two observations; the reason could be simply that Nāgārjuna's arguments, when examined closely, turn out to be fallacious and therefore not very convincing to a logically astute reader. By using faulty argumentation, Nāgārjuna was able to arrive at

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some spectacularly counterintuitive conclusions. The fallaciousness of his arguments would explain why many generations of Indian Buddhists after Nāgārjuna's time ignored much of what he had to say; the Indian Buddhist tradition was for the most part quite insistent on sound argumentation. And the counterintuitive conclusions would help explain why some modern readers have assumed that since Nāgārjuna's conclusions do not follow from his arguments, he was not trying to conform to the canons of standard logic at all but was instead presenting a radical critique of standard logic, or was at least working within the framework of some kind of so-called deviant logic.

The principal object of this paper is to examine some of Nāgārjuna's arguments in order to determine exactly what type of fallacy he most often employs. In order to reach that object, I shall first try to determine the purpose behind Nāgārjuna's argumentation by looking not only at the conclusions he claimed to have reached but also at the reasons why he may have found it important to arrive at those conclusions. The next step will be to examine the actual fallacies upon which his conclusions rest. Once that has been done, the final section of this paper will examine some of the types of interpretation that modern scholars have used in their attempts to make sense of Nāgārjuna's style of argumentation; it will be suggested, but probably not proven definitively, that these interpretive strategies have much more affinity with modern philosophical preoccupations than with anything that would have seemed important to Nāgārjuna.

2. NĀGĀRJUNA'S PHILOSOPHICAL GOAL

Probably more has been written about Nāgārjuna, in English at least, then has been written about any other Buddhist philosopher. As is to be expected, the more scholars investigate and write about Nāgārjuna, the less agreement there is as to what his principal goals were in setting down his ideas in the way he did. Depending on what one reads about Nāgārjuna in secondary sources, one can come away with the impression either that he was a mystic, or a radical critic of the forms of Buddhism that preceded him, or a conservative trying to get back to certain basic principles that had somehow gotten lost in the scholastic developments that took place between the time of the

historical Buddha and his own time. Of course these different interpretations are not necessarily incompatible, but they do give us somewhat different pictures of the type of world view and the kinds of religious practices one might expect to find associated with a person who expressed himself in the ways that Nāgārjuna did. I cannot hope to solve the problem of which of the competing views of Nāgārjuna is the most accurate, but I think it is possible at least to reject some interpretations of his thought that are not well-supported by a close examination of his writings. Before doing so, however, let me offer a quick recapitulation of what I take to be the most important tenets in his system of ideas.

In speaking of the philosophical goals of Nāgārjuna, discussion will be limited in this paper to one text, the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* (MMK). In this text there is abundant evidence that Nāgārjuna's principal objective is essentially the same as that which is common to all Buddhists of the classical period. Thus it can be said of Nāgārjuna in particular, just as it can be said of Buddhist writings in general, that the texts were written as antidotes to the erroneous thinking that, according to Buddhist theory, functions as the root cause of all distress. More specifically, Nāgārjuna's argumentation is offered as a corrective to two particular views concerning the continuity of the self after the death of the physical body. On the other hand, there is the view that the self is identical with the physical body and the physically generated mental events; when the body dies, so does the mind, and hence so does the self. This first view, known as the view of discontinuity (*ucchedavāda*), is traditionally regarded as one limit (*anta*). The opposite limit, called the view of perpetuity (*śāśvatavāda*), is that the self is not identical with and is separable from the body-mind complex so that the self continues to exist after the decomposition of the body and the mental events based therein. Nāgārjuna's position, and indeed the position of Buddhist doctrine in general, is said to be a position in between these two limits.

In trying to determine Nāgārjuna's principal objective, the natural places to begin looking are the statements he makes at the beginning and at the end of his *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*. That work opens with these well-known lines (MMK 1:1—2):

anirodham anutpādam aucchedam aśāśvatam|
anekārtham anānārtham anāgamam anirgaman||
yaḥ pratītyasamutpādam prapañcopaśamaṃ śivaṃ|
deśayām āsa sambuddhas taṃ vande vadatāṃ varam||

I pay homage to the finest of speakers, who, being fully awakened, showed happiness to be dependent origination, the quelling of vain thinking, which is without any coming to an end, without any coming into being, without discontinuity, without perpetuity, without singularity, without plurality, without any approach and without any retreat.

And at the end of this same work, Nāgārjuna again pays respects to the Buddha in these words (MMK 27:30):

sarvadṛṣṭiprahāṇāya yaḥ saddharmam adeśayat|
anukampām upādāya taṃ namasyāmi gautamam||

I prostrate before Gautama, who, after experiencing compassion, taught true virtue in order to dispel all opinions.

Embedded in these seemingly simple verses are a number of rather difficult problems of interpretation, which I have tried to avoid in my translation by using ordinary language as much as possible so as not to employ technical terms that would favour one philosophical interpretation over any other. Having avoided these problems by a neutral translation, let me now face them head on.

Look first of all at the opening verse that was cited above. In it we are told that the Buddha taught that true happiness (*śiva*) consists in quelling vain thinking (*prapañcopaśama*). And the last verse of the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* asserts that the purpose of the Buddha's teachings was to dispel all opinions (*dṛṣṭi*). What is crucial to an understanding of Nāgārjuna's thought is some appreciation of what is meant by the words "prapañca" and "dṛṣṭi."

Before we go any further in this line of inquiry, it should be pointed out that both of these words are virtually devoid of any constant precise meaning. Rather, they are variables that are capable of being

given a more or less precise meaning by the Buddhist who uses them. Every Buddhist uses these words to connote wrongful uses of the mind. So, whenever we encounter the terms in a given text, all we can know for sure is that they refer to mental habits that have to be got rid of if we are to attain the greatest good. For some Buddhist thinkers, wrongful mental habits might consist in holding certain specified views that are contrary to the principal dogmas of institutionalized Buddhism. For others, a wrongful use of the intellect might consist in any sort of analytical thinking. For yet others, it might consist in naive, uncritical thinking. But in the usage of any given thinker, we can never be sure without further investigation just exactly what kinds of mental habits are seen as being impediments to our highest well-being. So in Nāgārjuna's verses all we can know for sure is that the terms have undesirable overtones.

Fortunately, it is not too difficult to discover what Nāgārjuna means by the term "opinion (*dṛṣṭi*)," since the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* contains an entire chapter on exactly that subject. In fact, it is the final chapter in his work and serves as a summary of all that he has been trying to achieve from the very outset of his treatise. In this summary chapter, Nāgārjuna gives several examples of the kinds of opinion he feels are counterproductive. He says at the outset of the chapter:

> dṛṣṭayo 'bhūvaṃ nābhūvaṃ kiṃ nv atīte 'dhvanīti ca|
> yās tāḥ śaśvatalokādyāḥ pūrvāntaṃ samupāśritāḥ||
> dṛṣṭayo na bhaviṣyāmi kim anyo 'nāgate 'dhvani|
> bhaviṣyāmīti cāntādyā aparāntaṃ samupāśritāḥ||
>
> There are opinions concerning such things as an eternal world that depend upon a beginning point in time. Examples of such opinions are "I existed in the past," or "I did not exist in the past."
>
> There are opinions concerning such things as termination that depend upon an ending point in time. Examples are "I will not exist in the future," or "I will be someone else [than who I am now]."

On reading these two verses it becomes clear that the opinions that require elimination are just those that presuppose that one has some definite personal identity. Opinions that presuppose that there is a definite personal identity that one carries around throughout one's life are, according to Nāgārjuna, ungrounded opinions. If one presupposes that there is a definite identity, that is, something essential in oneself that remains the same while peripheral things undergo change, then it is quite natural to wonder about such questions as the starting point of one's existence, such as whether one began at conception or at birth. And it is also natural to wonder whether one existed in some sense prior to the present existence, and to wonder whether at some point in the future one's self will cease to exist.

But if there is no warrant for the presupposition that there is something stable and unchanging, then all such opinions about the past (before the present life) and future (after the present life) become groundless. At the very best, dwelling on beliefs that are groundless is a waste of time that could be devoted to more constructive thoughts. And at the worst, groundless beliefs always carry the risk of not conforming to reality, and whenever one's beliefs do not conform to reality, there is a possibility of the unpleasant experience of being taken by surprise by unexpected realities. Therefore, groundless opinions are among the encumbrances to be discarded in order for one to achieve happiness.

There is one other key verse in Nāgārjuna's *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* that sheds light on the opening two stanzas. It is verse MMK 24:18, which reads:

> yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatāṃ tāṃ pracakṣmahe|
> sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā||
>
> We claim that dependent origination is emptiness. To be empty is to be a derivative idea. That alone is the middle path.

If all these verses that have been considered so far are taken together, it is fairly clear that Nāgārjuna is arguing that the intuitive notions we have of our own personal identities are complex notions or derivative

ideas (*upādāya prajñaptiḥ*). If these complex ideas can be analysed into their simpler parts, then one can dispense with them. In particular, one can dispense with the idea of a self, which is the ultimate root of all unhappiness. Accordingly, nearly all the remainder of Nāgārjuna's work sets about the task of showing that the concept of a permanent self cannot possibly correspond to anything in the real world, because the very notion is riddled with internal contradictions. It is, in other words, Nāgārjuna's aim to show that the notion of a self is in the final analysis an unintelligible notion.

During the course of the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*, Nāgārjuna provides arguments for a number of theorems that bear on the general conclusion that nothing has a self. Two of these subsidiary theorems that will come up for discussion in the course of this paper are the following:

Theorem 1. *No beings at all exist anywhere.* (na jātu kecana bhāvāh kvacana vidyante)

Theorem 2. *Nothing can undergo the process of change.* (kasya anyathātvaṃ bhaviṣyati)

The reasoning that Nāgārjuna presents in support of these theorems will be examined below in section 3; in the present section the principal task is simply to understand what these theorems mean, and what they imply.

In order to understand the standard interpretation of Theorem 1, it may be helpful to bear in mind that it is made in the context of an examination of the basic postulates of Buddhist ābhidharmika scholasticism. According to the scholastics, a being is that which has an identity (*svabhāva*), that is, a characteristic by which it can be distinguished from beings that have different identities. One can make a theoretical distinction between two types of being. Simple beings are those that cannot be broken up or analysed into small components, while complex beings are organized aggregations of simple beings. The ontological position taken within most schools of classical Buddhist abhidharma is that complex beings do not exist as beings above and beyond the simple beings of which they are composed. Insofar as a

complex being has any identity, its identity is derivative, being a product of the identities of its elementary parts; as was shown above, a being whose identity is derivative is said to be empty (*śūnya*). Simple beings, on the other hand, do have distinct identities, according to the scholastics, and can therefore be said to exist in their own right. Simple beings are basic properties (*dharma*). They may be physical properties, such as resistance, cohesion, and motility; or basic psychological properties such as attraction, aversion, indifference, joy, sadness, equanimity, understanding, misunderstanding and so forth. When it is said that a person has no self (*ātman*), what is meant is that a person is a complex being whose identity is a product of all the many physical and mental properties that are organized into a single system. Now in stating Theorem 1, Nāgārjuna is making the claim that not only do complex beings lack an identity and therefore an ultimate reality, but so do simple beings. In the final analysis, then, there are no beings of either kind that exist anywhere.

Theorem 2 is also related to scholastic ways of thinking. According to the metaphysical principles followed by the ābhidarmikas, complex beings are prone to undergo change, because anything that is composite is liable eventually to undergo total decomposition. And before decomposing altogether, a complex being is prone to losing some of its parts and acquiring new parts to replace those that have been lost. A person, for example, may lose the psychological property of attraction for a particular object and replace it with the property of indifference towards that object. The process of losing and substituting their elementary parts is the mechanism by which complex beings undergo change, and eventually death or destruction. Since such change is inevitable, people who become fond of complex beings are bound to feel the unpleasant psychological properties of sadness and so forth that attend the experience of a change or loss of an object of affection. According to classical Buddhist theory, the best strategy for breaking the habit of becoming fond of complex objects is to focus the attention on the simple properties of which they are composed, and to recognize that even these simple properties are transient.

Credit must be given to the ābhidharmikas for providing a cogent theory of change and for recognizing that all complex beings are liable to undergo change. The ābhidharmikas also deserve credit for realizing

that the notion of change in a complex being is, like the notion of such a being's identity, a derivative idea. In the same way that a complex being's identity is the product of the identities of the parts of which it is made, a complex being's change of state is a product of the relative locations of its elementary parts. Thus, in the technical language of Buddhist abhidharma, the change the complex beings are said to undergo is also empty. The main shortcoming of the ābhidharmikas' account of change is that it fails to provide any account for how simple beings can undergo change. Complex beings lose their existence by losing their integrity; that is, their components, become scattered to such an extent that the parts no longer hang together as a single aggregation. But how does a simple being lost its existence? It could be said that a simple being has only one part and therefore loses its existence by losing its one part, but the question still remains: how does a simple being lose its only part? Since the being is identical to its sole component, the being cannot be separated from its single property; the part of a simple being cannot be scattered in the same way as the parts of a complex being. The only way a simple being can go out of existence is if its single part goes out of existence, but there is no account for how its single part loses its existence.

Recognizing that a simple being can neither lost its integrity, not can it go out of existence, Nāgārjuna observed that a being that has an identity (*prakṛti, svabhāva*) cannot undergo change. Add this to the ābhidharmika conclusion that the change of complex beings is a derivative idea rather than a primitive fact of the world, and one arrives at Theorem 2: nothing can undergo the process of change.

As we saw above, Nāgārjuna's view of the Buddha's teaching was that it served to help people achieve happiness by dispelling all opinions (*sarvadṛṣṭiprahāṇa*). Presumably, Nāgārjuna saw his own task as helping his readers achieve the same goal by the same means. Since most opinions are in some way or another about beings and the changes they undergo, Nāgārjuna's strategy seems to be to dispel opinions by showing that in the final analysis opinions have no subject matters. Showing the insubstantiality of the subject matters of opinions is, in other words, a way of trying to starve opinions out. According to Buddhist theory, the sensual appetites can be starved by withdrawing the attention from sensible objects; recognizing the

intrinsic unattractiveness of sensible objects helps one to be willing to withdraw that attention. Similarly, curiosity and the other intellectual appetites can be starved by withdrawing the attention from intellectible objects, namely, the properties (*dharma*) cognized by the intellectual faculty (*manovijñāna*). Realizing that all properties are insubstantial helps one to be willing to withdraw attention from them. Nāgārjuna's *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*, I suggest, is a method of helping one attain that realization. What remains to be investigated now is the soundness of the argumentation by which Nāgārjuna tries to prompt that realization.

3. NĀGĀRJUNA'S APPEAL TO REASON: EXAMINING HIS ARGUMENTATION

The form of argument that Nāgārjuna uses throughout his *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* is exemplified by the ones adduced in his discussion of causal relations, which is the topic of the first chapter of the work. The strategy of argumentation in the first chapter of that work is one that he uses repeatedly, without significant variation, throughout his philosophical writing. Therefore, it is worth examining Nāgārjuna's arguments on the topic of causal relations in some detail.

3.1. *Arguments in MMK 1: pratyāya-parīkṣā*

It is no accident that Nāgārjuna begins his *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* with an examination of causal relations. There is probably no concept more central to formal Buddhist doctrine than that of causality. The notion of cause and effect is the very backbone of the four Noble Truths, which are in turn regarded as the very essence of the Buddha's teaching. Taken as a whole, the Four Noble Truths state that discontent has an identifiable cause, and if this cause can be eliminated, then so can its effect. In other words, the very goal of Buddhist theory and practice is to achieve lasting contentment, which is said to be possible only through the elimination of the ultimate causes of discontent. Without a concept of causality, therefore, there could be no Four Noble Truths, and without these truths there would be no teaching identifiable as Buddhism.

Nāgārjuna's close examination (*parīkṣā*) of the notion of causality begins with this assertion in MMK 1:3:

> na svato nāpi parato na dvābhyāṃ nāpy ahetutaḥ|
> utpannā jātu vidyante bhāvā kvacana kecana||
>
> There are absolutely no beings anywhere that have arisen from themselves, nor are there any that have arisen from something other than themselves, nor are there any that have arisen from both, nor are there any that have arisen from no cause at all.

The reasoning behind these assertions could be summarized as follows:[3]

(1) It cannot be thought that a being comes into being from itself. If a being comes into being at one moment out of itself at a previous moment, then there is no change in that being from one moment to another. If there is no change, then it is not appropriate to say that anything new has "come into being." Rather, it would be appropriate to say that something has remained static. And even if one is talking about the same moment, there is a fundamental contradiction involved in saying that two things are identical: if there is identity, there is only one thing. Therefore, we cannot say, for example, that a single self comes into being from the plurality of properties belonging to the five groups (*skandhas*) *and* that the self is identical with those properties.

(2) It also cannot be said that a being comes into being from something other than itself. If a being is said to be capable of coming into being from what is absolutely different from itself, then it should be possible to say that anything can arise from anything else without restraint, and there should be no constraints on what can be regarded as a cause of a particular effect. It should be possible to say, for example, that a pumpkin seed causes an oak tree to grow. But this is not what people mean when they talk of causes, and especially this is not what the Buddha meant in articulating the Four Noble Truths. He did not say that dissatisfaction comes into being owing to just anything chosen at random, but rather he specified that it comes into being owing to particular kinds of desire and certain specific misconceptions.

(3) Given that one cannot say that a thing comes into being from what is absolutely identical, and one cannot say that it comes into being from what is absolutely distinct, perhaps one can say that a being comes into being from that which is in some respects the same and in some other respects different from itself. Although this suggestion appears to make sense, Nāgārjuna argues that one cannot in fact say that a being comes into being from something that is both the same as itself and other than itself. The only way that something can be in some ways identical and in some ways different from a second thing is if both things are complex beings, that is, beings that are composed of many aspects. But this is not the sort of being that the Buddha was talking about when he discussed causality; he was talking about dharmas, which are not composite beings made up of more simple parts. Since dharmas are simple, there can be no question of two dharmas being in some respects the same and in some respects different. It cannot, therefore, he said that one dharma arises from another dharma that is partically the same and partially different.

(4) Finally, it cannot be said that beings arise from no causes whatsoever. There is, of course, no internal contradiction in this statement, but it is incompatible with the basic assumption of the Four Noble Truths. So, while one can hold to this view as a possible view, one cannot pass this view off as a possible interpretation of the teachings of the Buddha.

What is characteristic of his strategy is that Nāgārjuna first sets out all the logically possible relationships between the two items under examination, and then he tries to show that none of the apparently possible relationships is actually possible. This leads him to conclude that, since there is no possible relationship between the two would-be relata, the relata themselves do not really exist. Hence the heart of the first chapter of *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* is the conclusion stated in MMK 1:3: "No beings at all exist anywhere." This is the content of Theorem 1 discussed in section 2 above.

Now before this conclusion can be reached, it must be firmly established that none of the apparently possible relationships between a being and what preceded it is in fact possible. Of these four apparently possible relations between a cause and its effect, three are fairly

obviously impossible. Given the reasons stated above, one is not likely to want to argue that an effect arises out of a cause that is identical to the effect itself, nor that an effect arises out of a simple cause from which it is in some respects identical and in some respects different, nor that an effect arises out of no cause at all. It may be the case that a simple being cannot come into being out of another simple being, for the reasons stated above. It is, however, by no means obvious that a complex being does not come into being from another complex being or from a collocation of simple beings. In fact, this is precisely the relationship between cause and effect that intuitively seems most correct: the cause is a different thing from its effect. Even if one would want to add the qualification that an effect arises from a cause that is the same *kind* of thing as the effect itself, one would intuitively want to say that the cause is one thing and the effect another. So Nāgārjuna's reasons for dismissing this possibility require a closer examination.

It is important to note that the position that Nāgārjuna examines is the common Buddhist view based upon the notion that each simple property (*dharma*) is distinguished from every other simple property in virtue of possessing its own distinct nature, called its *svabhāva* or its own nature, which is a nature that no other simple property has. Each property's own nature is in effect its identity, in the sense of that by which it is differentiated from others. In his criticism of this view, Nāgārjuna plays on an ambiguity in "svabhāva," the word for own nature. The word "sva-bhāva" means a nature (*bhāva*) that belongs to the thing itself (*svasya*); it refers, in other words, to a thing's identity. But Nāgārjuna takes advantage of the fact that the word "svabhāva" could also be interpreted to mean the fact that a thing comes into being (*bhavati*) from itself (*svataḥ*) or by itself (*svena*); on this interpretation, the term would refer to a thing's independence. Assuming this latter analysis of the word, rather than the one that most Buddhists actually held, Nāgārjuna then points out that whatever comes into being from conditions is not coming into being from itself; and if a thing does not come into being from itself, then it has no *svabhāva*. But if a thing has no *svabhāva*, he says, it also has no *parabhāva*. Here, too, Nāgārjuna takes advantage of an ambiguity in the key word he is examing. The word "para-bhāva" can be analysed to mean either (1) that which has the nature (*bhāva*) of another thing (*parasya*), that

is, a difference, or (2) the fact of coming into being (*bhavati*) from another thing (*parataḥ*), that is a dependence.

When one reads Nāgārjuna's argument in Sanskrit, it is not immediately obvious that the argument has taken advantage of an ambiguity in the key term. But when one tries to translate his argument into some other language, such as English or Tibetan, one finds that it is almost impossible to translate his argument in a way that makes sense in translation. This is because the terms in the language of translation do not have precisely the same range of ambiguities as the words in the original Sanskrit. In English, we are forced to disambiguate, and in disambiguating, we end up spoiling the apparent integrity of the argument.

Let's look at the phrasing of Nāgārjuna's argument in the original Sanskrit and see why it looks plausible. The original argument as stated in MMK 1:5 reads:

> na hi svabhāvo bhāvānāṃ pratyayādiṣu vidyate |
> avidyamāne svabhāva parabhāvo na vidyate ||
>
> Surely beings have no *svabhāva* when they have causal conditions. And if there is no *svabhāva*, there is no *parabhāva.*

As we have seen above, the word "svabhāva" can be interpreted in two different ways. It can be rendered either as **identity** (which I shall call svabhāva$_1$) or as **causal independence** (svabhāva$_2$).[4] Similarly, the word "parabhāva" can be interpreted in two ways. It can be rendered as **difference** (parabhāva$_1$), or as **dependence** (parabhāva$_2$).

Now the sentence in MMK 1:5ab makes perfectly good sense if it is understood as employing svabhāva$_2$.

Statement 1. *Surely beings have no* ***causal independence*** *when they have causal conditions.* (*na hi svabhāvaḥ bhāvānām pratyayādiṣu vidyate* |)

Statement 1 makes sense at face value, because it is obviously true that if something is dependent upon causal conditions, it is not independent of causal conditions. The sentence in MMK 1:5cd, on the

other hand, makes better sense if it is understood as employing svabhāva$_1$ and parabhāva$_1$.

Statement 2. *And if there is no **identity**, then there is no **difference**. (avidyamāne svabhāve parabhāvaḥ na vidyate |)*

Statement 2 also makes sense at face value, because a thing's identity is understood as a feature that distinguishes the thing from things other than itself; if a thing has no such features, then it has no identity and is therefore not distinguishable or different from other things.

It would be much more difficult to get a true statement out of the sentence in MMK 1:5cd if it were understood as employing svabhāva$_2$ and parabhāva$_2$.

Statement 3. *And if [beings have] no **independence**, then they have no **dependence**. (avidyamāna svabhāva parabhāvaḥ na vidyate |)*

Indeed statement 3 seems to be quite false at face value. So if one gives Nāgārjuna the benefit of the doubt by assuming that he was trying to write sentences that were true (or at least appeared to be true at face value), one is likely to reject statement 3 as the correct interpretation of MMK 1:5cd and to adopt statement 2.

The problem that now arises is this: no matter how much sense statement 2 may make as an independent statement, it does not at all follow from statement 1. It only appears to follow in the original Sanskrit because of the ambiguity of the expressions involved. A careful logician would not be deceived by Nāgārjuna's argument, but it is phrased in such a way that it might very well take the unwary reader off guard.

Sprung, in order to make MMK 1:5 even appear convincing in English translation, has to coin a new English expression. He comes up with this (Sprung, 1979, p. 66):

If there are conditions, things are not **self-existent**; if there is no **self-existence** there is no **other-existence**.

Sprung's translation has the obvious advantage of preserving the prima facie plausibility of the original Sanskrit, but it has the equally obvious

disadvantage of using a neologism that does not readily convey any meaning to a speaker of the English language. Whereas the word "self-existence" occurs as a standard English word with the meaning of independence, "other-existence" is merely a calque that avoids the task of offering a real translation. Inada's translation also employs calques rather than real interpretations (Inada, 1970, p. 40):

In these relational conditions the **self-nature** of the entities cannot exist. From the non-existence of **self-nature**, **other-nature** too cannot exist.

Kalupahana's translation of this verse makes use of the same calques as Inada's (Kalupahana, 1986, p. 107):

The **self-nature** of existents is not evident in the conditions, etc. In the absence of **self-nature**, **other-nature** too is not evident.

Experiencing difficulty in making sense of Nāgārjuna is not confined to those who tried to translate him from Sanskrit into other languages. Even his own Sanskrit commentators showed signs of having trouble making Nāgārjuna's arguments appear sensible. Candrakīrti, for example, like Sprung and Kalupahana, has his work cut out for him. Note what he says (Vaidya, 1960, p. 26, lines 17 ff.):

> avidyamāne ca svabhāve nāsti parabhāvaḥ| bhāvānāṃ bhāva utpādaḥ| parebhya utpādhạ parpabhāvaḥ| sa na vidyate| tasmād ayuktam etat parabhūtebhyo bhāvānām utpattir iti|
>
> And if there is no *svabhāva* there is no *parabhāva.* The word "bhāva" means the act of coming into being, or the act of arising. The act of arising from others is what is meant by "parabhāva." But that [act of arising from others] does not exist. Therefore, it is incorrect to say that there is coming into being or arising from others.

It is very difficult to see why "it is incorrect to say that there is coming into being or arising from others." Candrakīrti is left without a strong argument for why this is incorrect, and so all he can do is to assert it strongly and hope that no one will question him too forcefully.

Nāgārjuna's second critique of the notion of causal relations is

independent of his first argument. the second argument is based on the interdependence of the ideas of cause and effect. The argument goes something like this:

(1) A condition can only be called a condition when something arises from it. In other words, when no effect is arising from a condition, the condition is not a condition.

(2) It can be said in general that to exist is to be identical to oneself. Conversely, if a thing is not identical to itself, it does not exist.

(3) A condition is not a condition.

(4) Therefore, a condition does not exist.

(5) If a condition does not exist, then it cannot give rise to an effect.

Like Nāgārjuna's earlier attempt, this argument also takes advantage of an ambiguity. But when the ambiguity is removed, the argument ceases to carry any persuasive power. There is an important distinction to be made between saying that a thing exists at all and saying that it exists under a given description. This can be illustrated by considering the following sentences:

Statement 4. *An acorn exists.*

Statement 5. *An acorn exists as the cause of an oak tree.*

Statement 5 is true only if an oak tree arises from the acorn, but statement 4 may be true whether or not an oak arises from the acorn. Now if we look at two of the premises of Nāgārjuna's argument, it can be seen that he is talking about existence in two different ways, and these two ways are counterparts to the distinction illustrated in statements 4 and 5.

In saying "A condition is not a condition," Nāgārjuna is saying something very much like "The condition (for example, an acorn) does not exist as a condition (that is, as the cause of the oak.)" In saying "therefore, a condition does not exist," however, Nāgārjuna would like us to believe that he means that the condition does not exist at all. But this conclusion does not at all follow from anything he has said leading up to it. It is only by playing on the ambiguity of such terms as "existence" that Nāgārjuna can create the illusion of a valid argument.

3.2. *Arguments in MMK 15:1—11*

Nāgārjuna's use of equivocation is nowhere more evident than in the arguments in which the term "svabhāva" occurs. The ways in which Nāgārjuna glides from one meaning of that term to another merits a closer examination. It was suggested above that the word "svabhāva" is capable of being interpreted either as identity ($svabhāva_1$) or independence ($svabhāva_2$), and that "parabhāva" can be interpreted either as difference ($parabhāva_1$) or dependence ($parabhāva_2$). In fact, the form of these words naturally allows for a richer interpreptation than that. The word "bhāva" is a verbal noun formed by adding the primary suffix (*kṛtpratyaya*) known in the Pāṇinīyan system as GHaÑ to the root √BHŪ. According to Pāṇini the sufix GHaÑ forms verbal nouns that have one of three senses: (1) the simple name of the action named by the verbal root itself,[5] (2) the instrument by which an action is carried out or through which a state of affairs arises, or (3) the location in which an action is performed.[6] These three senses that a verbal noun (VN) formed with GHaÑ can have will be symbolized in the discussions that follow as $\mathbf{VN}_{(P)}$, $\mathbf{VN}_{(I)}$ and $\mathbf{VN}_{(L)}$ respectively. Given the possibility of verbal nouns of this form to express more than one factor in a situation, the family of words used in MMK 15 that have "bhāva" as the principal feature can be analysed as having the following range of meanings.

$bhāva_{(P)}$	The performance of the act of coming into being; the performance of being present; existence.
$bhāva_{(L)}$	That in which the performance of the act of coming into being occurs; a being, that which is present; an existent.
$abhāva_{(P)}$	The performance of the act or fact of not being present; absence. The performance of the act of ceasing to be present; becoming absent.
$abhāva_{(L)}$	That in which the performance of the act of not being present occurs; an absentee.

svabhāva$_{1\ (P)}$	The fact of being identical.
svabhāva$_{1\ (I)}$	An identifying characteristic; an identity; an essence.
svabhāva$_{1\ (L)}$	That in which the fact of being identical occurs; that which has an identity; an identifiable thing.
svabhāva$_{2\ (P)}$	The fact of being causally independent; independence.
svabhāva$_{2\ (L)}$	That which is independent.
parabhāva$_{1\ (P)}$	The fact of being other or different; otherness, difference.
parabhāva$_{1\ (I)}$	A differentiating characteristic; a differentia.
parabhāva$_{1\ (L)}$	That which is different; another.
parabhāva$_{2\ (P)}$	The fact of being dependent; dependence.
parabhāva$_{2\ (L)}$	That which is dependent.
anyathābhāva$_{(P)}$	The process of changing, altering.
anyathābhāva$_{(L)}$	An alteration, a change.

The effect that Nāgārjuna achieves by switching from one sense of these key terms to another can be illustrated by examining the argument of the fifteenth chapter of the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*, in which all but one of the eleven verses in the chapter contains at least one of the terms listed above.[7] The chapter opens with this verse (MMK 15:1):

> na saṃbhavaḥ svabhāvasya yuktaḥ pratyayahetubhiḥ|
> hetupratyayasaṃbhūtaḥ svabhāvaḥ kṛtako bhavet||

> Birth of an independent thing from causes and conditions is not reasonable. An independent thing born from causes and conditions would be a fabrication.

This statement is indisputably true, because it follows from the definition of the notion of independence; it would be a logical impossibility for a thing that is causally independent to be dependent on causes. For this first statement to be indisputably true, then, the term "svabhāva" must be understood as **svabhāva**$_{2\ (L)}$. The use of "svabhāva" in the sense of **svabhāva**$_{2\ (L)}$ continues into the next verse (MMK 15:2):

> svabhāvaḥ kṛtako nāma bhaviṣyati punaḥ kathaṃ|
> akṛtimaḥ svabhāvo hi nirapekṣaḥ paratra ca||

> But how could an independent thing be called a fabrication, given that an independent thing is not a fabrication and is independent of anything else?

It is in the next verse (MMK 15:3) that one can find a shift from one sense of "svabhāva" to another as well as from one sense of "parabhāva" to another.

> kutaḥ svabhāvasyābhāve parabhāvo bhaviṣyati|
> svabhāvaḥ parabhāvasya parabhāvo hi kathyate||

> How, in the absence of an identifiable thing, could there be a difference, given that the identity of a different thing is called a differentia?

The first sentence of this verse makes perfectly good sense when considered in isolation. Difference occurs in relation to a point of reference, and if there is no point of reference, then difference is unintelligible. But this statement does not follow from anything that has been said in the first two verses. This statement only appears to follow from the previous ones because of the use of the term "svabhāva" in this verse and in the two that precede it; the term is not used, however, in the same sense in the three verses:

(1) The birth of a **svabhāva**$_{2\ (L)}$ from causes and conditions is not reasonable. A **svabhāva**$_{2\ (L)}$ born from causes and conditions would be a fabrication.

(2) But how could a **svabhāva**$_{2\ (L)}$ be called a fabrication, given that a **svabhāva**$_{2\ (L)}$ is not a fabrication and is independent of anything else?

(3) How, in the absence of a **svabhāva**$_{1\ (L)}$, could there be **parabhāva**$_{1\ (P)}$, given that the **svabhāva**$_{1\ (I)}$ of a **parabhāva**$_{1\ (L)}$ is called a **parabhāva**$_{1\ (I)}$?

The next two verses (MMK 15:4—5) also make use of equivocation. In verse 4 the term "svabhāva" appears again in the sense of **svabhāva**$_{2\ (L)}$, and "bhāva" also occurs in two different senses.

svabhāvaparabhāvābhyām ṛte bhāvaḥ kutaḥ punaḥ|
svabhāve parabhāve vā sati bhāvo hi sidhyati||
bhāvasya ced aprasiddhir abhāvo naiva sidhyati|
bhāvasya hy anyathābhāvam abhāvaṃ bruvate janāḥ||

How can there be existence (**bhāva**$_{(P)}$) without either independence (**svabhāva**$_{2\ (P)}$) or dependence (**parabhāva**$_{2\ (P)}$), given that existence (**bhāva**$_{(P)}$) is established when there is either independence or dependence?

If an existent (**bhāva**$_{(L)}$) is not established, an absence (**abhāva**$_{(P)}$) is certainly not established, given that people call the change of state (*anyathābhāva*) of an existent (**bhāva**$_{(L)}$) its ceasing to be present (**abhāva**$_{(P)}$).

Verse 4 makes the claim that everything that exists must be either causally independent like ether (*ākāśa*) or dependent on causes and conditions, so there is no existent that is neither independent nor dependent. This claim is not one that anyone is likely to dispute. Making this claim does not, however, really serve the purpose that Nāgārjuna appears to wish for it to serve. His argument in MMK 15:3 was that neither a *svabhāva* nor a *parabhāva* can be established; his

claim in MMK 15:4 is that there is no existent unless there is either *svabhāva* or *parabhāva*; and from these two premises the conclusion is supposed to follow in MMK 15:5 that there is no *bhāva*, and if there is no *bhāva* then neither is there *abhāva*.[8] Owing, however, to the fact that the key terms "svabhāva" and "parabhāva" are used in different senses in MMK 15:3 and MMK 15:4, the conclusion that Nāgārjuna asserts does not follow from the premises that he offers as grounds for that conclusion.

It is impossible to determine in which of the possible senses the terms under consideration are used in MMK 15:6—7:

> svabhāvaṃ parabhāvaṃ ca bhāvaṃ cābhāvam eva ca|
> ye paśyanti na paśyanti te tattvaṃ buddhaśāsane||
> kātyāyanāvavāde cāstīti nāstīti cobhayaṃ|
> pratiṣiddhaṃ bhagavatā bhāvābhāvavibhāvinā|| 7 |
>
> They who perceive **svabhāva**, **parabhāva**, **bhāva** and **abhāva** do not perceive the truth in the Buddha's instruction.
>
> In the *Kātyāyanāvavāda* the Lord, who clearly saw **bhāva** and **abhāva** denied both the view that one exists and the view that one does not exist.

As Kalupahana (1986, p. 7) has observed, the *Kātyāyanāvavāda* is the only Buddhist text that Nāgārjuna cites by name or even alludes to in the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*.[9] In this text, which was reportedly accepted as canonical by every school of Buddhism,[10] the Buddha is portrayed as explaining to Kātyāyana that the middle path consists in avoiding the two extremes of believing that all things exist (*sarvam asti*) and believing that nothing exists (*sarvaṃ nāsti*).[11] The middle path that avoids these two extremes is the recognition that everything that is experienced comes into being through conditions and fails to come into being when its conditions are absent. It is, according to the sūtra, this correct view (*samyagdṛṣṭi*) of conditional arising (*pratītyasamutpāda*) that is supposed to replace the incorrect perceptions of existence (*astitva, bhāva*) and non-existence (*nāstitva, abhāva*) and above all the incorrect perception of a self (*ātman*).

In MMK 15:8, the word "prakṛti" is introduced and appears to be used as a synonym of "svabhāva"; the term "prakṛti" is evidently being used in the sense of nature or natural disposition:

> yady astitvaṃ prakṛtyā syān na bhaved asya nāstitā|
> prakṛter anyathābhāvo na hi jātūpapadyate||
>
> If a thing were to exist by nature, then it could not fail to exist, for the change of state of a nature is certainly not possible.

Saying that it is in the very nature (*prakṛti*) of a thing to be a particular way is equivalent to saying that the thing in question cannot be any other way. Therefore, if it is in the nature of a thing to exist, then it cannot be any other way than existent. In this context, then, "prakṛti" is being used in the sense of unalterability, uniformity and identity; it refers to precisely that characteristic or set of characteristics in a thing that are not subject to change (*anyathābhāva, vikāra*).[12] In contexts in which "prakṛti" means essence in contrast to accident (*vikṛti*), it overlaps in meaning with "svabhāva" in the sense of identity, that is, **svabhāva**$_{1\ (I)}$. This sense of the term "prakṛti" is carried into the next verse, MMK 15:10, which reads:

> prakṛtau kasya cāsatyām anyathātvaṃ bhaviṣyati|
> prakṛtau kasya ca satyām anyathātvaṃ bhaviṣyati||
>
> And in the absence of a nature, what can undergo the process of change? On the other hand, if a nature is present, what can undergo the process of change?

The only possible conclusion of this pair of statements is that there is no change. And so to Theorem 1 we can now add the following as one of the claims that Nāgārjuna is unambiguously making: "Nothing can undergo the process of change." This is the content of Theorem 2 discussed in section 2.

The last two verses of the chapter related the conclusions arrived at here to the overall themes of the entire *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*,

namely, that a clever person rejects both the view that the self is perpetual and the view that the self is discontinued after the death of the physical body. MMK 15:10—11 read as follows:

> astīti śāśvatagrāho nāstīti ucchedadarśanaṃ|
> tasmād astitvanāstitve nāśrīyeta vicakṣaṇah||
> asti yaddhi svabhāvena na tan nāstīti śāśvatam|
> nāstīdānīm abhūt pūrvam ity ucchedaḥ prasajyate||

> The notion of perpetuity is that one exists; the notion of destruction is that one fails to exist. Therefore, a wise person should not experience existence or non-existence.

> Perpetuity follows from believing that that which exists independently (*svabhāvena*) does not fail to exist; destruction follows from believing that that which existed before no longer exists.

The ways in which authors of previous studies of the fifteenth chapter of the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* have translated these eleven verses appears in Appendix A below. An analysis of the differences in the translations appears in Appendix B.

3.3. *Summary of Nāgārjuna's fallacies*

Just how well Nāgārjuna used logic has long been a matter of interest to modern scholars. Most of these studies have focussed on his use of the tetralemma (*catuṣkoṭi*) and have sought to discover whether or not this way of framing questions betrays either an ignorance of the law of contradiction or a deliberate use of some kind of non-standard or deviant logic.[13] Studying the tetralemma alone is not likely to shed much light on Nāgārjuna's knowledge of logic, since the tetralemma was a fairly primitive framework for posing questions that was in use before the time of the Buddha. The Buddha's use of this framework may have inclined Nāgārjuna to treat it with some respect, even if his own command of logic had advanced beyond the level of sophistication that the tetralemma represents. Given that the conceptual tools at the disposal of intellectuals in India had improved considerably during

the half-millennium that separated Nāgārjuna from the Buddha, one can expect that Nāgārjuna's presentation of certain ideas would be somewhat more clear and precise that the Buddha's presentation had been.[14] In any event, one must look at much more than his use of the tetralemma to ascertain Nāgārjuna's command of logical principles, and indeed his whole attitude towards the limits of rational discourse. One scholar who set out to do a more comprehensive study of Nāgārjuna's argumentation was Richard Robinson. Thirty-five years ago Robinson (1957) provided evidence that Nāgārjuna explicitly knew about and referred to the law of contradiction. To quote just one of the five citations that Robinson gave, Nāgārjuna wrote in MMK 8:7cd

> parpasparaviruddhaṃ hi sac cāsac caikataḥ kutaḥ|
>
> For how can presence and absence, which are mutually exclusive, occur in the same thing?

Robinson (1957), p. 295) also provided textual evidence of three passages in which Nāgārjuna explicitly stated the law of excluded middle. Since adherence to these two laws is the criterion that people usually use in distinguishing between standard and deviant systems of logic, it is unquestionable that Nāgārjuna's logic was quite standard. This does not mean, however, that he was always correct in his use of logic by modern canons of validity. Robinson found, for example, three passages in which Nāgārjuna clearly committed the formal fallacy of denying the antecedent (p. 297); this is an argument of the form:

$$p \rightarrow q$$
$$\neg p$$

$$\neg q$$

This use of a formally invalid structure may have been quite innocent, says Robinson, since Nāgārjuna's use of argumentation was in general at about the same level as Plato's; both seem to have had a good intuitive grasp of basic logical principles, but both also used forms of argumentation that later logicians would come to recognize as

fallacious. Denying the antecedent was not recognized as a fallacy in Europe until Aristotle discovered it; there is no clear evidence that it was recognized in India before Nāgārjuna's time. Given that the state of knowledge of formal logic was much more crude in Nāgārjuna's time than in later generations, says Robinson, it is not at all surprising that his contemporaries used lines of reasoning that later Indian Buddhists, not to mention people in the twentieth century, would know to avoid. "It's not that they [*viz.*, Nāgārjuna's contemporaries] were worse thinkers than the moderns, but simply that they were earlier. It is in this milieu that Nāgārjuna's reasoning should be appraised" (Robinson, 1957, p. 307).

In another penetrating study of Nāgārjuna's methods of argumentation, Robinson (1972a) compares Nāgārjuna's presentation to a *trompe-l'œil* or sleight-of-hand trick.

> Its elements are few and its operations are simple, though performed at lightning speed and with great dexterity. And the very fact that he cannot quite follow each move reinforces the observer's conviction that there is a trick somewhere. The objective of this article is to identify the trick and to determine on some points whether or not it is legitimate.

The "trick" that Robinson discovered lay in Nāgārjuna's definition of the term "svabhāva" in such a way that it was self-contradictory. If the *svabhāva* as defined by Nāgārjuna exists, says Robinson, "it must belong to an existent entity, that is, it must be conditioned, dependent on other entities and possessed of causes. But by definition it is free from conditions, nondependent on others, and not caused. Therefore, it is absurd to maintain that a *svabhāva* exists" (Robinson, 1972a, p. 326). Exposing the absurdity of the notion of *svabhāva* as defined by Nāgārjuna only does damage, of course, to those who actually used the term as defined by him. In the remainder of his article, Robinson shows that in fact none of Nāgārjuna's philosophical rivals did use the term "svabhāva" as he had redefined it, and therefore no one was really refuted by him. In his concluding remark, Robinson says:

> The nature of the Mādhyamika trick is now quite clear. It consists of (a) reading into the opponent's views a few terms which one defines for him in a self-contradictory way, and (b) insisting on a small set of axioms which are at variance with common sense and not accepted in their entirety by any known philosophy. It needs no insistence to emphasize that the application of such a critique does not demonstrate

the inadequacy of reason and experience to provide intelligible answers to the usual philosophical questions.

To the various fallacies and tricks brought to light by Robinson in his articles, we can now add the informal fallacy of equivocation as outlined above. That is, not only did Nāgārjuna use the term "svabhāva" in ways that none of his opponents did, but he himself used it in several different senses at key points in his argument.

4. NĀGĀRJUNA'S APPEAL TO MODERNS: EXAMINING HIS INTERPRETPERS

In the previous section I have tried to show that if one analyses the arguments of Nāgārjuna carefully, then it is possible to reveal their weaknesses. In particular, it was argued that many of Nāgārjuna's arguments are undermined by the informal fallacy of equivocation, that is, using a key term in different senses. What is achieved by revealing the fallacious nature in Nāgārjuna's argumentation is simply the freedom to reject the conclusions that he claims to have reached; since the arguments are not sound, one is not compelled to accept their conclusions. In showing that the arguments are not sound, I have merely shown that the ways of thinking that Nāgārjuna was apparently trying to discredit remain more or less unscathed by his criticisms. This helps explain why generations of Buddhist philosophers coming after Nāgārjuna — and most Indian Buddhist philosophy did develop several centuries after his time — could reasonably continue, without embarrassment or apology, to use the concepts and technical terms that he had apparently tried to show were groundless: concepts such as identity, difference, cause, effect, potential and so forth.[15]

It is less obvious, perhaps, that the fallaciousness of Nāgārjuna's thinking may also account for his popularity among people in the second half of the twentieth century. My central thesis in this section of the paper is that since Nāgārjuna employed faulty reasoning, he was able to arrive at conclusions that seem contrary to both reason and common sense experience, such as the conclusions that there are no beings and that nothing undergoes change; and, since there is a robust willingness on the part of many twentieth century intellectuals to

entertain philosophical perspectives that challenge the very foundations of most classical thought and of common sense, there is a predisposition to be attracted to anyone as apparently extraordinary as Nāgārjuna.

Defending such a thesis will require both mustering some evidence and indulging in some speculation without the benefit of compelling evidence. The principal evidence to be examined will be drawn from the writings of scholars and thinkers that I take to be representative of three related but different schools of modern thought. What all these schools have in common is (1) some kind or another of negative view of classical metaphysics and classical ethics, and (2) an assumption that Nāgārjuna's principal agenda was also to criticize metaphysics and to avoid the perceived pitfalls thereof. Again for the sake of ease of presentation, I have called these schools by names that their adherents themselves have used, or at least would probably readily accept: Absolutism, Logical Positivism, and Deconstructionism. Having discussed and criticized each of these schools, I shall conclude by referring to twentieth century interpreters of Nāgārjuna who have attempted to place him firmly in his own classical context, disregarding his relevance, or lack thereof, to modern times. Before looking at any of the particular modern schools of Nāgārjuna, however, let me venture a few observations about modernity in general.

Modern people evidently have a great affinity for Nāgārjuna's philosophy. Of all the thinkers of Indian Buddhism, he has attracted by far the most attention. This vast amount of attention that is paid to him is not merely due to the fact that Nāgārjuna is regarded to have been important in his own time. Much of it is due, I think, to the fact that people find him somehow important for our times. To understand why it is that people of the modern age think they like Nāgārjuna, it will be necessary to say a little about some of the shared assumptions of some of the prominent intellectual trends of the late twentieth century.[16]

Two noteworthy trends of the thought of this period that have had a bearing on people's search for philosophers in antiquity who might have anticipated these modern trends are (1) a skepticism about moral issues, or at least a sense that ethical questions are essentially subjective in nature, and (2) a critical attitude towards the enterprise of

metaphysics. Usually ethical reasoning is systematically related to metaphysical and epistemological standpoints. What has most preoccupied modern interpreters of Nāgārjuna has been his attitude towards metaphysics. But before examining some of the modern ways of interpreting Nāgārjuna's stance on metaphysics, let me make some brief observations on how his doctrines might appeal to people influenced by the ethical skepticism of modern thought.

4.1. *Nāgārjuna and ethical relativism*

The twentieth century has been an era of almost constant warfare, or at least an incessant preparedness for war, in nearly every region of the planet. Many people in these circumstances have grown weary of the categorical messages in the ideological propaganda designed to make populations think of themselves as morally upright people who must be ever ready for combat against those who have been designated as the sinister enemies. People who find such propaganda tedious are usually predisposed to seek out alternatives to the uncompromising rhetoric of the warriors. Looking for more irenic ways of thinking and talking, many such people have been attracted by the apparently open-minded spirit of the Buddhist doctrine of emptiness; indeed, one of the many possible interpretations of the doctrine that all dharmas are empty is that this doctrine implies that no teachings or doctrines or ideologies of any kind are absolutely and irrefutably true, for "teaching" is one of the many meanings that the word "dharma" can have.[17]

Not only are no teachings indisputably true, according to this peaceable interpretation of the doctrine of emptiness, but even the very concepts of "true" (*sat*) and "false" (*asat*), "competence" (*kuśala*) and "incompetence" (*akuśala*), "good" (*puṇya*) and "evil" (*pāpa*), and "virtue" (*dharma*) and "vice" (*adharma*) are arbitrary and groundless. Interpreting the doctrine of emptiness in this way is congruent with a set of conclusions about ethics that have been commonly accepted in twentieth century thought, quite often by people who are only dimly aware of the reasoning that one might offer in support of the conclusions. Those conclusions are (1) that moral propositions are neither true nor false, (2) that moral statements are based on judgements of value rather than grounded in the ascertainment of facts, (3) that

moral stances are therefore essentially subjective and indefensible by any rational means, and (4) that since there is no logical or rational defense of moral statements, the only defense of morality is on purely aesthetic grounds.

The kind of moral relativism found in the twentieth century is closely related to views on metaphysics and epistemology that have evolved in Europe since the eighteenth century. The evolution of modern ethical thinking has been described convincingly by Alasdair MacIntyre (1984, pp. 36—78); while MacIntyre's principal interest was the history of European thought, most of what he says about classical Greece could also be said, with only slight modifications, of ancient India.

In ancient Greek philosophy, observes MacIntyre, the propositions of ethics were regarded as statements of fact. This could be so, because the Greeks saw morality as a method designed to convey people from their present state of discontent to their potential state of contentment. Ethics was, in other words, a method of attaining a goal. In much the same way, the teachings of classical Indian Buddhism are presented as a praiseworthy path (*ārya-mārga*) leading from discontent (*duḥkha*) to contentment (*sukha*).[18] In classical Greek thought, as in classical Buddhism, any statement about whether or not a given mode of behaviour would get one to a state of contentment was as accessible to rational and empirical investigation as a statement about whether a given road leads to Athens. This type of thinking prevailed in European thought until the eighteenth century, during which time the thinkers ushered in a new way of thinking that they called the Enlightenment, thereby suggesting that most of the thinking that had preceded that century had been dark and obscure. The intellectuals of the Enlightenment had grown very suspicious of the perceived abuses of claims of divine authority and they began to seek out methods of attaining knowledge that were not in any way dependent upon such claims. As this tendency increased, empiricism and scientific rationalism came to dominate people's ways of thinking. People came to believe that the only things that are objectively real are those things that are revealed to the senses. Among the many things that are not revealed to the senses are potentials, the presently invisible seeds of future events. And among the many kinds of insensible potentials are goals

(*telos*) and purposes. Now ethics, as seen in classical times, is a goal-oriented activity. Post-Enlightenment thinkers, on the other hand, tried to dispense with the concept of ethics as goal-seeking activity. But in so doing, they deprived ethical propositions of the only claims they had on being either true or false. If one removes the concept of a destination, the question of whether or not any given road is the right one becomes meaningless. In the absence of a criterion by which ethical statements can be decided as true or false, all ethical propositions come to be seen as mere assertions of will. Conflicting ethical statements come to be seen as little more than slogans around which different individuals and groups of people rally in their bid for power. In classical thinking, the individual had meaning only in the context of the goal of contentment. In modern thinking, in the absence of a goal, the individual becomes absolute, something to be considered without reference to any other outside factors. As the individual becomes absolute, the old language of virtue gives way to the new language of individual rights and freedoms. And the classical study of morality is replaced by the study of how people use statements of right and wrong to secure their own self-interests, or worse, how some individuals and groups curtail the inalienable rights and freedoms of others.

While Nāgārjuna's discussions of emptiness may lend themselves to being viewed as being congruent in some respects with the ethical relativism of the twentieth century, it should be borne in mind that the kind of ethical relativism that has evolved in European and American circles is the product of a way of thinking that is quite different from those that prevailed in classical Greece or in classical India. It is possible, of course, that Nāgārjuna anticipated these modern ways of thinking, but it cannot simply be assumed that he did so. Until evidence can be produced that indicates clearly that Nāgārjuna's intention was to challenge the views on morality that prevailed in his times, the safer assumption is that he accepted the standard ethical views of his time without suspicion.

4.2. *The Absolutist interpretation*

The term "Absolute" entered European philosophical vocabulary in 1800 in a work entitled *System des transzendentalen Idealismus* by Friedrich Wilhelm Joseph von Schelling (1775—1854), who ushered

in an era of Absolutist philosophers, the most celebrated of whom were Johann Gottlieb Fichte (1762—1814) and Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770—1831). In the writings of these thinkers, the Absolute is described as the complete and perfect unity underlying the diversity of appearances; it is that which contains and at the same time supersedes all finite realities. Absolutism is a development of Immanuel Kant's (1724—1804) Critical philosophy, which questions the dogmatism in both empiricism and rationalism. In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, which was first published in 1781, Kant described his new "critical" philosophy as achieving within the sphere of metaphysics what Copernicus had earlier achieved within the sphere of astronomy. Before Copernicus, said Kant, the assumption had been made that the earth was fixed in space and that all the heavenly bodies, including the planets, moved around it. As a result of making this assumption, astronomers had to make elaborate theories of planetary motion to account for all the apparent reversals in the directions of planetary motion. Copernicus had argued that a much more elegant account of planetary motion could be achieved by acknowledging that the Earth, along with the other planets, was in fact in motion around the Sun. This radical shift in perspective from a geocentric to a heliocentric model of the planetary system enabled astronomers to arrive at a theory of planetary motion that was both more simple and more accurate. Similarly, before Kant, metaphysicians had operated on the assumption that the basic categories of metaphysics — such as time, space, potentiality, necessity, causality, and free will — corresponded to features of the real world, and that human beings discover these realities by means of reason. What Kant argued was that these metaphysical categories are part of the rational human mind itself and are imposed upon the world. The radical shift in perspective that Kant claimed to achieve is the realization that metaphysics is not a study of the world of nature, but rather a study in human thinking.

Following the lead of Kant's Critical philosophy, Absolutism is contrasted with Dogmatism, a derogatory name given to the belief that knowledge of the world can be attained empirically or rationally or through a combination of both. Typically it is said that the Absolute cannot be known either through the senses (empirically) or through the intellect (rationally). Knowledge of it therefore requires a special

kind of Intuition, which is experienced as a sense of complete unity of the knower with the object of knowledge.

4.2.1. *Stcherbatsky's neo-Kantian Mādhyamika*

Fedor Ippolitovich Shcherbatskoi (1866—1942), known to English readers as Theodore Stcherbatsky, was one of the first European historians of Buddhist philosophy to publish a neo-Kantian interpretation of Nāgārjuna, which appeared in his 1927 study of the first and twenty-fifth chapters of Candrakīrti's commentary to *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*. Stcherbatsky (1927, p. 17) declares that Nāgārjuna had concluded that for the Buddha

> . . . Reality was transcendent to thought. He [*viz.*, Nāgārjuna] systematized the four alternatives (*antas or koṭis*), mercilessly exposed the disconcerting implications of each alternative, brought the antinomies of Reason luminously to the fore by hunting them out from every cover, and demonstrated the impossibility of erecting a sound Metaphysic on the basis of dogmatism or rationalism. This was his dialectic. The four alternatives were already formulated by the Buddha. His originality consisted in drawing out by the application of rigorous logic the implications of each alternative, driving Reason in a *cul de sac* and thus preparing the mind for taking a right-about-turn (*parāvṛtti*) towards *prajñā*.

The Absolute Reality that escapes both empirical investigation and the methods of reason, says Stcherbatsky was called Nirvāṇa by Buddhists (Stcherbatsky, 1927, 'The conception of Buddhist Nirvana' section, p. 3). It could be achieved only by a special "faculty of appreciative analysis" (*prajñā*) (p. 3) that came about through the practice of "mystic trance" or "mystic intuition (*Yogi-Pratyakṣa*)" in which "the mystic sees in a moment the construction of both the gross and the mystic worlds as vividly as if they were an experience of direct sense-perception" (p. 4). In Mahāyāna Buddhism, the preparation for this "intuition of the transcendental truth" was provided by "the course of negative dialectic" (p. 4). For Stcherbatsky, then, the arguments of Nāgārjuna were a preliminary clearing of the mind of concepts that impeded the direct experience of the Absolute through the practice of yogic trance.[19]

Stcherbatsky's Absolutist interpretation of Nāgārjuna was criticized within a few years by Stanisław Schayer. Schayer (1931, pp. xxix—xxxiii) rejected the comparison with Kant and post-Kantian Europeans

in favour of comparisons between Nāgārjuna and such exemplars of what he called "mystischen Skepsis" as Pyrrho, Plotinus and al-Ghazālī, but he still regarded the Mādhyamikas as seekers of an Absolute that could not be achieved through the mundane methods of empirical investigation and reason; indeed, the principal difference between the Mādhyamikas and Kant, said Schayer, was that the Mahāyāna mystics believed that the Absolute could be experienced directly, whereas Kant did not.

Both Stcherbatsky and Schayer were criticized two decades later by Jan W. de Jong (1950). Schayer's mistake, said de Jong, had consisted in trying to isolate four separate meanings of the term "svabhāva" and failing to realize that these four meanings are so interconnected that they really reduced to just two. De Jong (p. 323) recapitulates Schayer's four distinct senses of "svabhāva" (see note 4 above) and goes on to say (pp. 323—24) "Mais, en fait, on ne peut tenir compte de cette distinction, car, pour Nāgārjuna, les quatre concepts indiqués par Schayer s'enchaînent étroitement les uns aux autres et peuvent se ramener à deux." The two senses to which the term "svabhāva" can be reduced according to de Jong are (1) that of an identifying nature (*svalakṣaṇa*) of things taken individually and (2) the immutable nature (*prakṛti*) of all things taken together as a single unity. The Mādhyamikas, says de Jong, equally denied both of these fundamental senses of "svabhāva". While critical of Schayer on this point, de Jong Nevertheless gives him credit for having realized that mystic intuition provided the epistemological foundation of the Mādhyamaka school's view of an absolute reality that can neither be described in words nor comprehended through the methods of dichotomous thinking.

What Stcherbatsky had failed to realize in his attempt to show the parallelism between Mādhyamika philosophy and various European forms of Absolutism, says de Jong (p. 326), was that analogies between European and Buddhist thinking only serve to distort the latter; moreover, they are not grounded on the evidence of the original texts. The Buddhist form of absolutism, claims de Jong, is quite uniquely "Oriental" and has no exact parallels in any kind of Western thought. He concludes by saying:

Nous espérons avoir réussi à démontrer qu'il est impossible de considérer l'absolu des Mâdhyamikas soit comme la totalité de l'être, soit comme le néant. Une telle alter-

native ne peut être posée que dans le cadre des habitudes de la pensée occidentale. L'absolu a, pour les Mâdhyamikas, une signification tout à fait différente. Sur le plan philosophique, ils s'abstiennent de tout jugement, mais l'expérience mystique les fait accéder par la délivrance à l'absolu.

4.2.2. *Murti's nondualist (advaita) Mahāyāna*

Notwithstanding de Jong's warning against describing Buddhist thought in terms of modern European philosophical categories, T. R. V. Murti continued along the road of Absolutist interpretation that Stcherbatsky had trod a generation earlier. In his *Central Philosophy of Buddhism*, first published in 1955 and revised in 1960, Murti claims that Nāgārjuna achieved a revolution in Indian Buddhist thought that was as significant as the revolution in astronomy achieved by Copernicus and the revolution in metaphysics made by Kant. Kant made his discovery, says Murti, owing to the insoluble philosophical problems that arose when the Empirical tradition, which consisted of mostly English and Scottish philosophers, confronted the Rationalist tradition, which consisted primarily of German and French philosophers. Nāgārjuna's breakthrough, says Murti, came about as a result of similarly insoluble philosophical problems that arose when the *ātman* tradition of brahmanical philosophy confronted the *anātman* tradition of early Buddhist philosophy. It was obvious to everyone that the debate over whether or not there is an imperceptible self that remains constant while all sensible properties undergo change could never be solved by purely empirical means, because the evidence of the senses cannot settle questions about topics that are said to lie in principle beyond the senses. And so people assumed — wrongly, according to Murti — that the question could be solved by intellectual methods, that is, by reason alone (or what Kant would call pure reason). Both Kant and Nāgārjuna, says Murti, saw the role of philosophy as being to reveal the "pretensions of reason". In doing so, the result was not simply one further philosophical system, but a radical critique of all philosophical systems, a critique that showed that there cannot be such a thing as a philosophical system that gives a satisfactory account of the real world (Murti, 1960, p. 294).

Where both Kant and Nāgārjuna fell short, according to Murti, was in their failure to realize the full implication of their own discoveries, namely, that "Mind (Thought or Reason) is the only Real, and all

activity is the activity of reason or consciousness" (Murti, 1960, 297). In Europe in took Hegel to bring this fully to light, and in India it required the Vijñānavāda Buddhists and the Advaita Vedāntin school of Hinduism. A key difference between Kant and Nāgārjuna, according to Murti, is that Kant denied that it was ever possible to get beyond the limits of the human mind; even realizing that the mind presents us with illusions is not sufficient to remove those illusions. Nāgārjuna, on the other hand, never deviated from the Buddhist view that it is possible to attain the Absolute by removing illusion (*avidyā*).

Murti argues in several places in his book that Dialectic is a key feature of early Buddhism and of Nāgārjuna's thinking. What Murti means by Dialectic may be clarified somewhat by the following passage (Murti, 1960, p. 124):

> Dialectic is a self-conscious spiritual movement; it is necessarily a critique of Reason. This is not possible without the consciousness of the opposition of the thesis and the antithesis. There must be at least two view-points or patterns of interpretation diametrically opposed to each other. A dilemma is not a dialectic, for that is a temporary predicament having reference to a particular situation. The Dialectic is a universal conflict affecting every sphere of things.

It was Murti's contention that the Buddha himself was the first philosopher in India to discover the Dialectic. His evidence for this was that the Buddha refused to answer certain questions, such as whether or not the world has a beginning or an end in time, and whether or not someone exists after death. Murti argues that the Buddha did not answer these questions because he recognized that they could not be answered at all. The Buddha's silence was his expression of his radical critique of Reason, which trades always in opposites. Thus the Buddha's silence was the first Buddhist use of Dialectic, which trades in the unification of such opposites. Similarly, Nāgārjuna's dialectic is portrayed by Murti as "a movement from the relativity of buddhi [intellect] which is phenomenal to the non-dual Intuition of the absolute, from *dṛṣṭi* [dogmatism] to *prajñā* [intuitive knowledge of the absolute]" (Murti, 1960, p. 301). But, while there may be certain similarities between the Buddhist use of dialectic and Hegel's use thereof, Nāgārjuna's dialectic differs from Hegel's in several important ways, says Murti. First, Hegel's dialectic is one in which a higher

synthesis reconciles the opposites of lower levels of truth, whereas Nāgārjuna's dialectic removes all opposites imposed by the intellect. Second, Reason for Hegel constitutes "the very fabric of the real", while for Nāgārjuna reason (*buddhi*) is the fundamental source of all ignorance, for it is reason that veils and obscures the underlying unity of the Absolute. It is Reason (*buddhi*) that impedes Intuition (*prajñā = advayaṃ jñānam*) (Murti, 1960, p. 304). Finally, the Absolute for Hegel is Thought, while for Nāgārjuna it is Non-dual Intuition (*Pranjñāpāramitā*).

Murti's fondness for using the term "Absolute" leads to the awkward situation of his having an embarrassment of Absolutes that must somehow be distinguished from one another, since not all the things he has labeled as Absolutes are equivalent. He therefore devotes an entire chapter to the task of distinguishing among the various systems of Indian philosophy that are, according to him, Absolutist. Murti (1960, pp. 311—328) offers a useful summary of the criticisms that the various schools of Indian philosophy — Advaita Vedānta, Vijñānavāda and Mādhyamika — made against one another. And he also attempts to show how these forms of classical Indian absolutism differed from the Absolutist philosophies of nineteenth century Europe. In almost every case, incidentally, Murti's account of the differences between classical Indian and modern European philosophies implies a deficiency in the latter. European philosophers are consistently portrayed as coming close, but ultimately failing, to achieve the brilliant insights of their Indian predecessors.

> The dialectic of Hegel is a brilliant superfluity; it has no spiritual value (Murti, 1960, p. 305).
>
> It is unfortunate that Kant missed the startling discovery that he had made. Prejudiced in favour of faith, Kant makes only a negative and trivial use of criticism. He should have taken criticism itself as philosophy, the true metaphysics as a science. The Mādhyamika, however, most consistently develops this. His absolute is the critical Reflection itself (Murti, 1960, p. 328).

In that same chapter, Murti also offers a summary of the points that he feels all the systems that he labels as Absolutist have in common. In all systems, he says,

> (1) The Absolute is transcendent, that is, it is "totally devoid of empirical determinations (*nirdharmaka, śūnya*)." In other words, the ultimate reality cannot be an

object of any of the senses, including the intellect. And from this is follows that "the absolute is realised only in a non-empirical intuition. . . . The nature of this experience is that it is non-discursive, immediate and unitary cognition; here essence and existence coincide" (Murti, 1960, p. 321).

(2) The Absolute is immanent, that is, it is the reality underlying all appearances. The Absolute is a single undivided reality, being without duality (*advaya*) and without characteristics or features (*nirdharmaka*).

(3) Since the nature of the Absolute is that it is single and undivided, knowleldge of it cannot be communicated through language, since language is based upon the making of distinctions.

(4) Absolutism makes it necessary to distinguish between Reality and Appearances. It also makes it necessary to distinguish between scriptures that are discussing Reality and those that discuss only Appearances. Thus in every Absolutism a distinction is made between two levels of truth or two levels of language.

(5) In all forms of Absolutism, the ultimate goal of religious practice is "complete Identity with the Absolute", that is, losing the individual self in the greater singleness of Being. So for the Mādhyamika, Nirvāna should be understood as loss of individual identity and consequent absorption into the oneness of the Absolute.

By the end of his study of the Mādhyamika system, Murti makes it very clear that he considers the philosophy as he has described it to be a solution to many of the ills of twentieth century life. Indeed, Murti ends his assessment of the Mādhyamika system with an almost passionate utopian vision of a world free from the conflicts among individuals and nations that are rooted in insupportable dogmas. This peaceful world, he argues, in which internal and external conflicts have all disappeared

> is possible in the advaita or advaya, where all our faculties and interests are unified as Brahman or Prajñāpāramitā. It is possible *only* in advaita, for that alone abolishes private standpoints and interests, which make for the ego-centric outlook. In the last analysis, the ego is the root of the unspiritual; the universal is the spiritual. Śūnyatā, as the negation of all particular views and standpoints, is the universal *par excellence* (Murti, 1960, p. 333).

Murti's version of Mādhyamika ends up being rather like a modern version of the philosophy of Advaita Vedānta. The philosophical standpoint of Advaita is preserved in Murti's Mādhyamika, but the dogmatic insistence on the authority of revealed scripture — so central to classical Vedānta — has been removed, and the entire institutional structure of both Advaita Vedānta and Mahāyāna Buddhism has also been removed.

> Denominational religions with their dogmas and organisational sanctions deservedly

stand discredited. There is something inherently secular and unspiritual in any organisation. It tends to create vested interests and to breed corruption. In stifling freedom of expression and setting up a norm of dogmas to which the votaries are required to conform, organised religion (the church) succeeds only in antagonising other religious groups and creating schisms and heresies within its own fold. What we need is the realisation of the spiritual which is the bed-rock of all our endeavour. Only mystical religion, which eminently combines the unity of Ultimate Being with the freedom of different paths, for realising it, can hope to unite the world (Murti, 1960, 241).

4.2.3. *Criticisms of the Absolutist interpretation*

Various shortcomings of the Absolutist interpretations of Nāgārjuna have already been articulated by several scholars. As we saw above, Schayer (1931) found it more profitable to compare Nāgārjuna with the Greek skeptics and with certain neo-Platonic thinkers than with the neo-Kantians. Robinson (1957, p. 292) also expressed the view that "The most usual comparisons, those with Kant and Hegel, are not apposite, because Kant's and Hegel's structures differ too radically from any of the Indian systems in question." Moreover, added Robinson, this attempt to compare Nāgārjuna with modern philosophers has the even deeper weakness of seeking "to answer our questions, rather than to identity Nāgārjuna's questions." Since Nāgārjuna and his contemporaries were "infinitely less sophisticated" than Kant and his contemporaries, argued Robinson, the modern historian of philosophy had better assess the accomplishments of Nāgārjuna in the historical milieu in which they were produced (Robinson, 1957, p. 307). And when one examines Nāgārjuna's doctrines in the context of his contemporary setting, it becomes clear that:

There is no evidence that Nāgārjuna 'uses logic to destroy logic.' He makes mistakes in logic, but does not deny any principles of logic. He asserts that a certain set of propositions — the Buddhist doctrine — is true under a certain condition, that of emptiness, and false under another condition, that of own-beingness (Robinson, 1957, p. 307).

Sentiments similar to Robinson's were expressed two decades later by Ruegg, who wrote that "A problematic has thus tended to be imposed on Buddhist thought in a form that does not in fact seem essential to the questions with which the Buddhist thinkers were actually concerned" (Ruegg, 1977, p. 52). Owing partly to criticisms such as these coming from scholars of the stature of Robinson and

Ruegg, and owing partly to the fact that Kantian and Hegelian philosophy have in general become somewhat *demodé* in recent decades and therefore no longer the standard of comparison against which other philosophical achievements are measured, few scholars of Buddhism educated after the Second World War have pursued the line of interpretation set forth by Stcherbatsky and Murti.

4.3. *The Positivist interpretation*

In European philosophy, Absolutism was but one child of Kant's Critical philosophy; another was the set of ideas known as Positivism, which shared the post-Kantian disdain for metaphysics. The term "positivism" was made a part of European philosophical vocabulary through the writings of Auguste Compte (1798—1857). There are many varieties of positivism, but typically the various types have in common that they hold the position that methodical empiricism, also known as the scientific method, is the only means of acquiring testable knowledge.

The particular name "Logical Positivism" was first applied to a set of ideas put forth by members of the Vienna circle, a group of mathematicians, physicists and philosophers of science that included among others the physicists Ernst Mach and Moritz Schlick and the philosopher Rudolf Carnap, whose training had also been in physics and mathematics. The doctrines of this school evolved over the span of two decades, from approximately 1920 until 1940. Many of the doctrines of this school were adopted by various philosophers and scholars in Great Britain and in English-speaking parts of North America. One of the key ideas of the Logical Positivists was the notion that a proposition whose truth or falsity cannot be determined through methodical and controlled testing procedures is simply meaningless. Such a proposition may appear to convey some meaning, say the Logical Positivists, but in fact it says nothing at all and is therefore neither true nor false. One branch of traditional philosophy that had been made up almost entirely of assertions that could not possibly be either confirmed or falsified by experience was metaphysics, the branch of philosophy dealing with such problems as the nature of being and non-being (presence and absence), causality, and potentiality and actuality. Therefore "metaphysics" came to be used by Logical Posi-

tivists as a derogatory name given to philosophical systems, and indeed to some forms of classical physics and mathematics and logic, that were based on propositions that cannot be verified or falsified by the scientific method.

Two prominent historians of Buddhist philosophy whose ideas reflect positivist influences are A. K. Warder and David J. Kalupahana. Warder and Kalupahana share a conviction — which many other scholars of Buddhism would now dismiss as an unwarranted assumption — that the Sutta-piṭaka of the Pāḷi canon represents the true spirit, although not the actual words, of the historical Buddha's teachings. Moreover, both scholars appear to accept the principle that the truest forms of Buddhism are those that remain closest to the teachings of Gautama the Buddha as recorded in the Pāḷi Sutta literature. Both Warder and Kalupahana find the spirit of this canonical Buddhism paradigmatically articulated in the Kesaputta Sutta of the Aṅguttara Nikāya, where the Buddha is portrayed as saying to the Kālāma people that one should not arrive at conclusions

> owing to hearsay, owing to tradition, owing to rumour, owing to distinction in canonical works, on account of speculation, on account of methodical reasoning, owing to a study of appearances, after contemplation and acquiescing to an opinion, because of plausibility nor by thinking "the ascetic is our revered teacher."[20]

This passage, as interpreted by Warder and Kalupahana, leaves the empirical method of acquiring knowledge, along with legitimate inferences grounded in one's own personal experience, as the sole methods of ascertaining the truth. Their Buddha, in other words, was an empiricist.

4.3.1. Warder's empiricist Buddhism

Warder does not explicitly liken the Buddha's teachings to those of the Logical Positivists, but he does claim that the Buddha regarded some metaphysical questions as "meaningless instead of being beyond our knowledge" (Warder, 1970, p. 194). He clearly recognizes the tension between what he sees as the anti-authoritarian empiricist stance of the passage of the Aṅguttaranikāya quoted above and the tendency of Buddhists to try to establish an authentic record of what the Buddha had said. Buddhists, says Warder (1970, p. 443),

found themselves in an apparent dilemma: they were to rely ultimately on experience, yet they attributed complete authority to the statements of the Buddha as handed down to them in the *Tripiṭaka*. . . . Of course there outht to be no discrepancy between these two [*viz.*, experience and authority]: the Buddha's words proceeded from experience and the laws of nature (he held) do not change, therefore anyone else's experience must lead to the same conclusions.

What follows from this view of the Buddha as a pure empiricist, of course, is that any of his followers who tried to arrive at a systematic, theoretically sound, intellectually satisfactory account of the master's teachings were — at least to the extent that they introduced metaphysical notions — deviating from the spirit of the Buddha's teachings, and therefore from true Buddhism. As ābhidharmikas and other scholastics set out to explain Buddhist principles, they naturally began to introduce notions that aided the theoretical understanding of Buddhist doctrine. And in introducing such theoretical constructs, argues Warder, they began to wander from the true nature of the Buddha's doctrine. At this point in history, it became necessary for someone to rediscover and reaffirm the purely empirical spirit of genuine Buddhism.

Warder claims that the work of Nāgārjuna was a continuation of the Buddha's original resistance to the notions of "existence" and "non-existence". About the charge that Nāgārjuna was a nihilist, he writes "In fact his rejection of 'non-existence' is as emphatic as his rejection of 'existence', and must lead us to the conclusion that what he is attacking is these notions as metaphysical concepts imposed on the real universe" (Warder, 1970, p. 382). The "real universe" for Warder is clearly the world discovered through the experience of the senses. The Buddha's doctrine, says Warder (1970, p. 377),

is not speculative but empirical: the Buddha emphatically rejected all speculative opinions (*dṛṣṭi*) and propounded no such opinion himself, only an empirical account of conditioned origination and the way to end unhappiness. The basic concepts of philosophy, even 'time', 'space', 'motion', 'causality', and so on, are themselves speculative, and Nāgārjuna shows by rigorous analysis that it is inconceivable how, for example, a 'motion' as understood in philosophy could ever take place.

Thus Warder's Nāgārjuna is a far cry from Murti's non-dualist Mādhyamika. Warder's Buddha and Nāgārjuna are firmly grounded in ordinary, common sense experience, while Murti's Buddha and Nāgārjuna

eschewed common sense experience along with reason and grounded themselves in a special kind of unifying experience called Intuition.

4.3.2. *Kalupahana's Positivist Buddhism*

While Warder's Buddha and Nāgārjuna were probably rather more like empiricists in the tradition of David Hume, Kalupahana's Buddha and Nāgārjuna were definitely akin to the Logical Positivists. Indeed Kalupahana (1976, p. 158) writes that the Buddha's rejection of metaphysical questions as utterly meaningless was unmistakably congruent with the teachings of the Logical Positivists. So eager is Kalupahana to maintain this congruence that, faced with having to give an account for the Buddhist doctrine of rebirth (which is not among the doctrines traditionally associated with the Vienna circle), he goes so far as to cite A. J. Ayer, "the chief exponent of Logical Positivism today", in order to show that even for someone like Ayer "the theory of rebirth as presented in the early Buddhist texts could be considered a *logical* possibility"; he also cites a passage from a work by C. D. Broad to show that the question of whether or not one survives after death is an intelligible question and not a meaningless one (Kalupahana, 1976, pp. 52—53). By invoking the testimony of these stalwart members of the Logical Positivist community, Kalupahana manages to clear the Buddha's name of the unpleasant accusation of having traded in meaningless metaphysical questions.

In his study of *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*, Kalupahana (1986) follows Warder's lead in portraying Nāgārjuna as a champion of the pristine empiricism of original Buddhism and a slayer of the metaphysical dragons that had a way of endangering the pure doctrine. Kalupahana's Nāgārjuna was, like the Buddha, "an empiricist *par excellence*" (Kalupahana, 1986, p. 81). A principal target of Nāgārjuna's philosophical darts, according to Kalupahana, were the Sarvāstivādins, who "presented a theory of 'self-nature' or 'substance' (*svabhāva*)", a theory that was "contrary to the fundamental philosophical tenet of the Buddha" (Kalupahana, 1986, pp. 1—2). While clearly siding with Robinson in his criticisms of the excesses of Stcherbatsky and Murti, Kalupahana as clearly rejects Robinson's suggestion that modern philosophers are more sophisticated than the Buddha and the Buddhists

of classical India. In a stinging indictment apparently (on the evidence of a footnote) directed at Mark Siderits's (1980) review of Kalupahana (1975), Kalupahana (1986, p. 5) writes:

> Some writers on Buddhism, intoxicated by this conception of the evolution of thought, have shown reluctance to recognize the sophistication with which philosophical ideas were presented by the Buddha 2500 years ago. Having failed miserably to perceive the philosophical ingenuity of the Buddha as reflected in the Nikāyas and the Āgamas, as well as the subsequent degeneration of that system in the later commentarial tradition, followed by a revival of the earlier system by philosophers like Moggaliputta-tissa and Nāgārjuna, these writers are insisting upon a gradual sophistication in Buddhist thought comparable to what one can find in the Western philosophical tradition.

As the above passage clearly shows, Kalupahana tends to consider deviations from the Buddha's message as recorded in the Pāḷi Nikāyas, to be "degenerations". In particular, the degenerate tendencies of the Sarvāstivādins and the Sautrāntikas led them to adopt substantialist and essentialist views that were based entirely on speculative reasoning and not in the least on empirical investigations. In short, the Buddhist scholastics became metaphysicians, "blinded" by such concepts as "identity and difference, substance and quality, self-nature and other-nature, permanence and annihilation" (Kalupahana, 1986, p. 81). Nāgārjuna's contribution to Buddhist philosophy, according to Kalupahana, was to heal his colleagues of their metaphysically induced blindness so that they could once again see clearly what the Buddha had taught.

4.3.3. *Criticisms of the Positivist interpretation*

The positivist interpretation of Nāgārjuna, and indeed of the Buddha, may be appealing to many people in the twentieth century, but it is not without its shortcomings. To begin with, it should be fairly obvious to anyone who goes through Nāgārjuna's arguments carefully that he rarely appeals to empirical observations. His view is not that nothing exists unless we can observe it through the senses, but rather that nothing corresponding to a given concept exists unless the concept is free of contradictions. His principal concern is to try to determine what exists and what does not exist, and this question is the paradigmatic question of the branch of philosophy that is traditionally called

metaphysics. If empiricism is the view that only sense-experience is a source of knowledge, and if rationalism is the view that reason takes precedence over experience, appeals to authority, and claimed revelation, then there can be no doubt that Nāgārjuna was more a rationalist than an empiricist. For him the highest good was the form of happiness that comes from seeing the world as it really is rather than through a fog of intuitions accepted uncritically. The means of reaching that highest good was through the careful application of reason to our intuitions towards the aim of eliminating those intuitions that could not stand up to close logical scrutiny. This work is all conceptual in nature with not even a hint of the kind of systematic, methodical, controlled scientific investigation so strongly endorsed by members of the Vienna circle.

Moreover, empiricists are rarely observed drawing such conclusions as Nāgārjuna's "No beings at all exist anywhere" and "Nothing can undergo the process of change." Furthermore, as was pointed out above, the doctrine of causality lies at the very heart of the doctrine declared by the Buddha. The Buddha's doctrine of dependent origination (*pratītya samutpāda*) — and therefore also Nāgārjuna's doctrine of emptiness (*śūnyatā*), which is defined as dependent origination — becomes utter nonsense if it is not construed as a doctrine of causes and their effects. The Four Noble Truths state that discontent (*duḥkha*) has a cause, namely misapprehension (*avidyā*), and that when the cause is removed, the effect no longer arises. The supreme happiness is described as the absence not only of actual discontent but of the very possibility of discontent. These notions of causality, potentiality and actuality were among the metaphysical ideas that came to be rejected by the earlier empiricists such as Hume as well as by the later Logical Positivists.

In an unpolished draft of a work in progress that was published after his death, Robinson (1972b, pp. 322—323) stated with reference to what he called the "pragmatist" interpretation of the Buddha's rejection of theory (*dṛṣṭi*) that this interpretation

> makes several complex and unwarranted assumptions: (a) that an opposition between theory and practice was formulated by Gautama; (b) that the *dṛṣṭi* are 'metaphysical'; (c) that Gautama's teaching (four truths, twelve *nidānas*) is not metaphysical. None of this is so.

A more simple interpretation of the available textual data, suggests Robinson, is that the Buddha rejected all theories that did not agree with his own theory. While not directed specifically at those who advocate an empiricist interpretation of the Buddha's teachings (and of his silence on some issues), Robinson's comments are apt criticism of the kind of view advanced by Warder and Kalupahana. Given Nāgārjuna's obvious preoccupation with the paradigmatic questions of metaphysics, and given the absence of any explicit preference for investigations that would qualify in any way as empirical, I am inclined to disagree with Kalupahana's assessment of Nāgārjuna as an "empiricist *par excellence*." Quite on the contrary, if given a choice between classifying Nāgārjuna as a rationalist, an empiricist or an anti-metaphysical Critical philosopher, I would have to say that Nāgārjuna in the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* strikes me very much as a rationalist *par excellence* and — dare I say it? — a metaphysician *par excellence.*

4.4. *The Deconstructionist interpretation*

Deconstruction is a term associated with Jacques Derrida and those influenced by him. Like absolutism and Positivism, the Deconstruction movement is motivated in part by a general suspicion of metaphysics that can be traced more or less directly back to Kant. To a somewhat greater degree than Absolutists and Positivists, the Deconstructionists have developed a technical vocabulary and a rather stylized manner of deliberately unorthodox presentation, influenced no doubt by *l'esprit de jeu* that characterizes the writings of Derrida. Owing to the self-consciously playful forms in which representatives of this school present their work (and disguise their ideas), it is more challenging to offer a concise summary of what this movement has tried to achieve.[21] The following, therefore, is no more than an essay — one with which many would probably find exception — at sketching out features of the Deconstructionist movement that have played a role in how some scholars have interpreted the thought of Nāgārjuna.

In trying to understand Deconstructionist criticism, it may be helpful to bear in mind that this movement evolved as a reaction to various features of the Structuralist school of thought that dominated intellectual circles in France in the 1950's. Structuralism, which was itself strongly influenced by the linguistic theories of Ferdinand de

Saussure, was typically grounded in the notion that literary works, like all other cultural phenomena, are products of socially mediated systems of interrelated elements which have no meaning in themselves but derive their significance only through their relationships with and opposition to other elements in the system. All such elements are arranged into hierarchical levels of which the users of the system, such as the speakers of a given language or the performers of a particular ritual, are only partially aware. The task that Structuralist critics set for themselves is to make explicit these structures of which the users of a system are not fully conscious but which they nevertheless correctly employ.

Complex structures require organizing principles around which their elements are ordered. And insofar as the elements of a structure acquire their significance in the context of the overall system of which they are a part, the organizing principle (such as the purpose for which a system came into being) assumes a dominant or central role, and the simple elements that are organized assume a dominated or marginal role. It is difficult to imagine organized systems in which such hierarchical arrangement is not a feature. When one is speaking in particular of social systems, then, the elements of which such systems are made include, among other things, people and groups of people. Much of the Structuralist analysis of society and of cultural phenomena, therefore, is a study of which groups of people are in dominant central positions and which groups of people are in marginalized positions. Thus while the task of a Structuralist critic in general is to make explicit the infrastructures of a system, the task of a social scientist using Structuralist methods might be to show, for example, the effects that domination has on both the central and the marginalized groups within a social system. Many social scientists, as they became aware of the deleterious effects that marginalization has had on some groups, even tried to suggest ways of modifying the structures so that some groups were less marginalized. In highly industrialized nations with a recent history of colonizing less industrialized peoples, social critics often used the concepts of structuralism to try to make their fellow citizens aware of how colonization had put the colonized people at a disadvantage. Many Structuralists became interested in trying to arrive at social structures that were less hierarchical in nature.

Deconstruction can be seen as partly a continuation of the reformist spirit of some structuralism, and partly a criticism of the central concepts of structuralism. As a continuation of reformist sentiments, many Deconstructionists take delight in inverting hierarchical expectations and focusing on the marginal rather than on the central elements in a system. Derrida, for example, has observed that in Saussure's system of linguistics, spoken language was seen as a system of symbols that signified an idea or concept or proposition, while written language was seen as a system of symbols that represented the sounds of the spoken language. Thus written language, being symbols of symbols, was always marginalized in favour of a study of spoken language, and spoken language itself was seen as being dominated by the ideas communicated through it. Derrida uses the term "logocentrism" to refer to hierarchical structures in which ideas play the dominant role, and in order to invert the expectations of this hierarchy he has deliberately drawn attention to writing as an independent act that may be appreciated without any reference at all to the putative ideas of the writer. Deconstructive textual interpretation, then, becomes not an act of trying to infer the ideas of the original author, but an act of playing with the written symbols in deliberate disregard of what the author's intention may have been in first inscribing them.

Deconstruction is also a criticism of structuralism that evolved from, among other things, a recognition that the very idea of a decentralized structure or non-hierarchal system is absurd. The whole history of the concept of structure, says Derrida (1988, pp. 109—110)

> must be thought of as a series of substitutions of center for center, as a linked chain of determinations of the center. Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the center receives different forms or names. The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymics. Its matrix . . . is the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the center have always designated an invariable presence — *eidos, archē, telos, energeia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject) *alētheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth.

The radical critique of metaphysics initiated by Kant eventually had, among its many consequences, that of questioning the very idea of centrality. Empiricists challenged the central notion of purpose (*telos*) in one manner, phenomenologists in another, existentialists in yet

another. Structuralists, on the other hand, adopted the dubious strategy of holding on to the notion of structure, in which purpose is central, while decrying the undesired effects of the marginalization that invariably results from something being regarded as central. Thus about the science of ethnology Derrida has observed that it "could have been born as a science only at the moment when a decentering had come about: at the moment when European culture — and in consequence, the history of metaphysics and of its concepts — had been *dislocated*, driven from its locus, and forced to stop considering itself as the culture of reference" (Derrida, 1988, p. 112). But the fact that any science develops within a cultural framework means that the results of its research must be communicated through a system of symbols and concepts that have come to be accepted by that culture. Therefore, the very critique of European ethnocentrism really made sense only in Europe, or in societies in which European ways of thinking had come to be central and other ways of thinking marginalized. Ethnology, in other words,

> is primarily a European science employing traditional concepts, however much it may struggle against them. Consequently, whether he wants to or not — and this does not depend on a decision on his part — the ethnologist accepts into his discourse the premises of ethnocentrism at the very moment when he denounces them. This necessity is irreducible; it is not a historical contingency (Derrida, 1988, p. 112).

Generalizing on this observation about the dilemma of Structuralist reformers, who were unable to criticize the presuppositions of their culture without adopting the very presuppositions they wanted to attack, Derrida suggests that one can never escape metaphysics through critiques thereof, for these critiques themselves are based on metaphysical presuppositions. Thus every attempt to decentralize some concept succeeds only in marginalizing the decentralized one and putting some other concept at the center. The run around metaphysics, if it can be achieved at all, can be achieved only through play (*le jeu*), that is, by the refusal to treat anything at all as central.

> Thus there are two interpretations of interpretation. ... The one seeks to decipher, dreams of deciphering a truth or an origin which escapes play and the order of the sign, and which lives the necessity of interpretation as an exile. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms play and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name of man being the name of that being who . . . has dreamed of

full presence, the reassuring foundation, the origin and the end of play (Derrida, 1988, pp. 121–122).

In practice, this play is typically carried out by deliberately teasing as many "meanings" as possible out of a set of symbols, even to the extent of showing that every text can be shown to hold directly contradictory meanings within itself. This practice is held to be justified by the observation that symbols always have a rich multiplicity of significations, or *polysemy*. Every text thus ultimately refutes itself. The task of the deconstructionist is simply to make apparent the self-refuting nature of every text and every system; the critic does not deconstruct a text but merely shows how the text deconstructs itself.

4.4.1. *Magliola on Nāgārjuna as deconstructive bodhisattva*

Robert Magliola has argued that Nāgārjuna's Mādhyamika has much in common with the philosophy of Derrida. The affinity is so close, he claims, that "without Derrida it is difficult for a 'moderner' to understand Nagarjuna!" (Magliola, 1984, p. 93). But, just as Murti's Nāgārjuna anticipated more than the best that later European Absolutists could offer, Magliola's Nāgārjuna anticipated more than the best that Derrida has been able to offer. Nāgārjuna, argues Magliola (1984, p. 87),

tracks the Derridean trace, and goes 'beyond' Derrida in that it frequents the 'unheard-of thought,' and also 'with one and the same stroke,' allows the reinstatement of the logocentric too. (As we shall see, we can 'have it both ways,' and the two ways are a non-paradoxical, ever altering and wayward ways; as we shall see, '*samsāra* is *nirvāna*'.)

Magliola, who does not claim Buddhist studies as his academic discipline, draws upon the work of numerous specialists in Indian philosophy and in Buddhist philosophy in order to present a picture of Nāgārjuna as a Buddhist who clearly saw the pitfalls of logocentrism and tried to rescue the Buddha's teachings from the dominant logocentric tendencies of scholastics and systematizers of his day, such as the ābhidharmikas. Logocentrism, says Magliola, "is any *identity* at all that one conceives, or even 'feels,' and then 'labels' or perhaps 'behaves towards' as if it were an 'idea'. And the structure of an identity, for Derrida, is necessarily a binary unit — factor and expres-

sion, signifier and signified" (Magliola, 1984, p. 89). And Nāgārjuna's *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* is best seen as an effort — a successful one at that — to avoid the binary nature of logocentric thinking altogether. Nāgārjuna does not, argues Magliola, simply achieve a mystical unity of opposites under an all-embracing Absolute, for Absolutism is logocentrism *par excellence*, since all opposites and particularities are simply marginalized while the Absolute is seen as the central element in terms of which all particulars derive their significance. Rather, Nāgārjuna shows a way of thinking and speaking that avoids binary oppositions and is thus a thinking that is beyond thinking and a speaking that is beyond speaking (Magliola, 1984, p. 94).

Offering a full sketch of Magliola's argument is not necessary to the purposes of this paper. Suffice it to say that his principal strategy is to quote at length from the anecdotal literature of the Chan and Zen schools of Buddhism,[22] and to indulge in a bit of deconstructive play with the Chinese characters used to convey key Mādhyamika terms.

4.4.2. *Other postmodern interpretations*

Other scholars have followed Magliola's lead in presenting Nāgārjuna as a thinker who anticipated Heidegger and the Deconstructionists who followed in his wake. One scholar who has included a few references to Deconstructive strategies in his sensitive attempt to interpret Mādhyamika philosophy in the light of such modern thinkers as Nietzsche, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Gadamer, Derrida and Rorty is C. W. Huntington (1989).[23]

Another scholar who has been influenced by Magliola's Deconstructive interpretation of Buddhism is David Dilworth in his introductory essay on Kitarō Nishida (Nishida, 1987, 1—45). According to Dilworth, Kitarō Nishida held the view that some East Asian Buddhists based their whole thinking upon a system of logic that denies the laws of contradiction and excluded middle. Nishida, a Zen Buddhist who taught philosophy at University of Kyōto and was a founding father of the celebrated Kyōto school of philosophy, was of the opinion that Eastern peoples think in a radically different way than Western peoples. Whereas Westerners, according to Nishida, rely upon a logic in which something either is the case or is not the case, which leads to all manner of confrontations between people who hold competing

views, Eastern logic can easily accommodate contradictions. In fact, says Nishida, the foundation of Eastern logic is not the law of contradiction but the law that says "A if and only if not A." It is the opinion of Dilworth that this Eastern logic is not unique to the Zen tradition but can be located in such Indian philosophers as Nāgārjuna. The evidence that Dilworth cites is the opening stanza of the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*, which we have already looked at. This stanza says of something that it is neither one nor many, that it neither endures nor comes to an end. What Dilworth takes all this to mean is that the subject to which these predicates apply is neither exclusively one nor exclusively many but rather is one precisely because it is many and many precisely because it is one; both unity and plurality apply to it at the same time and in the same respect.

4.4.3. *Criticisms of the Deconstructionist interpretation*

A key supposition in the case that Magliola (and, following him, Dilworth) makes is that Nāgārjuna makes use of a variety of what we have been calling deviant logic. Thus the success of his argument hinges on whether one concludes (1) that Nāgārjuna was deliberately using a form of logic not based on the laws of contradiction and excluded middle or (2) that he was using a standard logic but made mistakes in using it. As I have already indicated, the evidence is strongly in favour of the latter conclusion. Moreover, there is no need to assume that Nāgārjuna is dealing in a deviant logic, since it is quite possible to give a good account of what he was trying to achieve while remaining well within the bounds of the standard logic that, so far as I am aware, every classical Indian philosopher favoured. It is quite legitimate in standard logic to predicate contradictory predicates of a given subject, provided that the subject does not name something that exists. And that, I think, is exactly what Nāgārjuna tried to show over and over again in his work, namely, that there are certain subjects to which contradictory predicates can seemingly be applied, and therefore we can only conclude that the subjects themselves do not really exist. Far from deviating from the law of contradiction, Nāgārjuna relies constantly upon being able to derive contradictions from certain presuppositions; without the laws of contradiction and excluded middle, his whole enterprise becomes entirely ineffective.

In summary, while the Deconstructive approach to Nāgārjuna, like any kind of playfulness, may provide good amusement (perhaps especially for the author who writes it, since it is often more fun to play than to watch others playing), this approach probably offers rather little insight into Nāgārjuna's argumentation. Indeed, the Deconstructive interpretation of Mādhyamika helps to preserve the demonstrably false conclusion that Nāgārjuna used logic to destroy logic.

4.5. *Kamaleswar Bhattacharya*

Several of the interpreters examined up to this point have had in common a somewhat anachronistic tendency to search for anticipations of modern philosophical problems in the writings of a classical thinker. But as we have already seen, not all modern interpreters of Nāgārjuna have taken that approach; some have preferred to look for parallels only in the classical traditions of European philosophy rather than in modern thought. We have already noted that Schayer, Robinson and Ruegg all expressed misgivings about the attempt to find modern counterparts of early Buddhist thinkers, and that Schayer was interested in drawing parallels between Nāgārjuna and certain Greek skeptics. Another attempt to compare the thought of Nāgārjuna with his contemporaries in the Hellenistic world appears in Hayes (1988, pp. 50—62), where it is pointed out that some features of Nāgārjuna's thought are remarkably similar to characteristics in the work of Pyrrho of Elis, who reportedly accompanied Alexander the Great to India and who is given credit for founding the skeptic school. In particular, an attempt was made to show some similarities between some trends in Buddhism and the Pyrrhonian values of non-assertion (*aphasia*), which was understood as the state of having no opinions, and inner calm (*ataraxia*), understood as the peace of mind that results from eliminating the emotional attachments that result from having beliefs.

Siderits and O'Brien (1976) also followed Schayer's lead in an article that pointed out the similarity between Nāgārjuna's arguments against motion and the arguments against motion presented by the Greek philosopher Zeno of Elea (born 490 b.c.e.) The similarity in the arguments themselves and in the conclusions reached raises the question of whether the two philosophers had a similar purpose in arguing

as they did. Unfortunately, the textual evidence is too scanty to enable one to arrive at any firm conclusions. The thought of Zeno of Elea has been preserved only in fragmentary form, that is, in quotations of his arguments by other philosophers, especially Aristotle. On the basis of what has been preserved, it seems fairly clear that what Zeno was trying to prove was the impossibility of plurality and the impossibility of motion. Being a follower of Parmenides, Zeno was apparently committed to the view that there is a fundamental and indivisible unity underlying all apparent diversity, and that all diversity is, therefore, in the final analysis illusory. Zeno's views are sometimes compared to those of some schools of *advaita* that arose in India at various times. If one takes the parallelism seriously, then it might well be concluded that the underlying motive of Nāgārjuna's method of argument was to establish that beneath the transitory and painful diversity of the world of experience there is a stable and peaceful unity, which can be discovered only through the application of metaphysical reasoning.

Other modern historians of classical Indian thought have preferred to avoid finding parallels between Nāgārjuna and his European contemporaries and instead to explain the Mādhyamika system solely in terms of philosophical currents present in the India of his day. One important scholar who has taken this approach is Kamaleswar Bhattacharya.

Like many other historians of philosophy, Bhattacharya (1984; 1985) is among those who have expressed some misgivings about the conclusions of those who have seen a remarkable parallelism between the Mādhyamikas and trends in modern thought. Those who see anticipations of modern and even post-modern tendencies in the early Madhyamaka, warns Bhattacharya, have often seen these similarities by neglecting what the classical texts themselves emplicitly say, and by failing to appreciate the texts in their own historical milieu. Bhattacharya (1984, p. 189) cites approvingly the Buddhist historian David Seyfort Ruegg, who criticizes some modern scholars for imposing their own prejudices and problematics onto the Madhyamaka texts. The result, says Ruegg (1977, p. 52), is a kind of ethnocentrism in which we assume that what we modern Westerners find of greatest importance and value must also be what the classical Indian Buddhists found of greatest importance and value.

Bhattacharya's misgivings about comparisons of Nāgārjuna with

Europeans is not confined to his wish to avoid anachronisms. He is equally skeptical about the attempts to compare Nāgārjuna to the ancient Greek thinker Zeno. Bhattacharya (1985, p. 13) cites Daniel H. H. Ingalls (1954), who writes that it is important to recognize that the paradigm of rationality for Zeno and most other Greek thinkers was mathematics and especially geometry, while the paradigm for rationality for Nāgārjuna and most Indian thinkers was *vyākāraṇa*, the methodical study of natural language. Zeno begins with the geometer's axioms about lines, points and planes, while Nāgārjuna begins with Pāṇini and Patañjali's definitions of action, agent, patient and instrument. The worlds of conceptual analysis may be so far apart that we can attach no significance to the apparent likeness in the conclusions reached by Zeno and Nāgārjuna, especially in the conclusion that there is no motion. Agreeing with Ingalls, Bhattacharya expresses the view that very nearly every modern interpreter of Mādhyamaka has failed to pay sufficient attention to Nāgārjuna's indebtedness to the worldview of the classical Indian grammatical tradition, and especially to the genius of Patañjali.[24] Bhattacharya finds it significant that hardy a single argument used by Nāgārjuna was unknown to the grammatical tradition. It is his indebtedness to the grammarians that distinguished Nāgārjuna from those Buddhists that preceded him and from the Greeks and such modern European thinkers as Kant, for whom mathematics was the supreme tool of analysis.

What one might conclude from Bhattacharya's work — Bhattacharya himself does not explicitly draw this conclusion — is that Nāgārjuna's contribution to Buddhism was the return of Buddhist thinking to the heartland of brahmanical intellectualism and hermeneutical methodology. Indeed, for all its apparently radical criticisms of commonly accepted ideas, Nāgārjuna's work is among the first pieces of Buddhist literature to bear all the earmarks of classical brahmanical ways of thinking. Not only can Nāgārjuna be given much of the credit for bringing Buddhism to the intelligentsia, but he can also be given much of the credit for bringing a certain kind of systematic argumentation into Buddhism.

4.6. *Nāgārjuna's philosophical goal: a reprise*

Taking up the hints provided by Bhattacharya, one might describe the philosophical importance of Nāgārjuna's work in something like the

following way. First, one of the most fundamental insights of the Sanskrit grammarians was that language does not directly relate to things as they really are in the world; rather, language is purely the result of a speaker's desire to depict a given situation is a given way. It is the speaker who decides which factors in a complex situation to mention and which to ignore; it is the speaker who decides which factors will be emphasized among those that are mentioned at all. There is nothing in the world that compels anyone to speak in any way. There is nothing that demands to be said at all, and there is especially nothing in the situation of the world that demands that things be said in a particular way. Speaking is willful activity that must be preceded by a desire to have others know one's thoughts. To this basic insight of the grammarians, one can add certain Buddhist doctrines about desire, arriving then at the following conclusions. One who is free of all desire has nothing to say. But the desire to speak is perhaps the last of the desires to be abandoned. What Nāgārjuna's analysis of the categories of speech may be intended to do, therefore, is to reinforce this insight of the grammarians, and simultaneously to reinforce the message of Buddhism. By seeing thoroughly into the intrinsic willfulness of speaking, and by seeing also that speaking is an action that can only create confusion in the final analysis, one may eventually abandon the desire to speak. And if one can abandon the desire to speak, one can easily abandon the desire to know.

The importance of abandoning the desires to speak and to know may become more clear by turning once again to a verse that has already been examined briefly. In the discussion of Nāgārjuna's philosophical goal (see Section 2 above), mention was made of verse MMK 24:18:

> yaḥ pratītyasamutpādaḥ śūnyatāṃ tāṃ pracakṣmahe|
> sā prajñaptir upādāya pratipat saiva madhyamā||
>
> We claim that dependent origination is emptiness. To be empty is to be a derivative idea. That alone is the middle path.

In the light of the insights provided by Bhattacharya, let us examine

the implications of this verse once again. First, it should be borne in mind that the expression "pratītya-samutpāda" literally means: "coming into being (*samutpāda*) after acquiring (*pratītya* = *prāpya*) something." What it means to say that something comes into being after acquiring something is explained by Nāgārjuna through the gloss that he himself provides to the term "pratītya samutpāda." He tells us that "coming into being" means "becoming apparent" or "becoming an object of knowledge." This interpretation is suggested by the gloss that Nāgārjuna gives to the term "samutpāda," namely, "prajñapti." This latter word literally means "the act of making someone aware of something" or "the act of bringing something to one's attention." Therefore we can say that for Nāgārjuna "to come into being" is equivalent in meaning to "to become an object of attention". Now it is said that the act of coming into being, or becoming an object of awareness is subsequent to another act, namely, the act of acquiring (*pratī*). The name for this action is glossed by Nāgārjuna by the verb "upādā." This verb has special significance in Buddhism. It names the action of clinging or being attached.[25] What this means, then, is that as a result of one's attachments, one creates the objects of one's own experience.

The stock list of attachments in Buddhism comprises four items: (1) attachment to pleasures (*kāma*), (2) attachment to views (*dṛṣṭi*), (3) attachment to habitual modes of behaviour (*śīla-vrata*), and (4) attachment to belief in a self (*ātmavāda*). Each of these attachments influences the kinds of things of which one becomes aware. Thus, attachment to pleasures brings about the fact that we tend to experience either what we wish to experience and take pleasure in experiencing or what we wish to avoid and find pain in experiencing; that which evokes neither pleasure nor pain tends not to be noticed. Attachment to views brings about the fact that we tend to experience what we believe we will experience; that is, we tend to notice mostly what reinforces our beliefs and opinions and easily overlook what challenges our most firmly held beliefs. Attachment to habitual patterns of behaviour brings about the fact that we tend to experience what we are accustomed to experiencing; that is, we notice what we have conditioned ourselves to notice. And attachment to belief in a self brings about the fact that we tend to place ourselves at the centre of all experience; that is, we see ourselves as perceiving subjects and the

rest of the world as objects either to be drawn into or eliminated from the horizons of our awareness. This world of experience as conditioned through various kinds of attachment is, however, said to be empty. Realizing the emptiness of all things is realizing that we would have no experiences at all without desire and craving. One who has no desire, according to this view, has no perceptions — that is, no interpretations of sensations. One who has no desires has only pure, uninterpreted sensations that are unmediated by language, unexpressed in language, unaccompanied by thought, and unaffected by attraction or aversion. One who has no desires also has no sense of self, no identity.

The general pronouncement that attachments are the immediate cause of things coming into being comes, of course, straight from classical Buddhism. The special insight that desire is also at the root of language, and also of the kinds of thinking that one does about experience, can be seen to stem from the grammatical tradition. Nāgārjuna's insight that attachments are the immediate cause of perception, in the sense of interpreting what is brought to the senses, can be described as a combination of the Buddhist view with the insight of the classical grammatical tradition, with which Nāgārjuna was clearly quite familiar.

5. THREE INTERPRETATIONS OF SILENCE

In Section 4 several interpretations of Nāgārjuna's presentation of Buddhism were compared and criticized. In the present section an attempt will be made to show the implications of three of these different interpretations by examining how each deals with the question of the Buddha's refusal to answer certain questions.

As is well known and often repeated, the Canonical tradition of Buddhism records that the Buddha refused to answer fourteen questions. These questions are called the undetermined or unexplained issues (*avyākatavatthūni, avyākṛtavastūni*). According to the texts, the Buddha said "I have not determined whether (1) The world is eternal (*sassato loko*), (2) the world is non-eternal (*asassato loko*), (3) the world has boundaries (*antavā loko*), (4) the world is unbounded (*anantavā loko*), (5) life is the physical body (*taṃ jīvaṃ taṃ sarīraṃ*), (6) life is one thing and the physical body is another (*aññaṃ jīvam aññaṃ sarīraṃ*), (7) one who knows the truth exists after death (*hoti*

tathāgato paraṃ maraṇā), (8) one who knows the truth does not exist after death (*na hoti tathāgato paraṃ maraṇā*), (9) one who knows the truth both exists and does not exist after death (*hoti ca na ca hoti tathāgato paraṃ maraṇā*), (10) one who knows the truth neither exists nor does not exist after death (*neva hoti na na hoti tathāgato paraṃ maraṇā*), (11) discontent is caused by oneself (*sayaṃ kataṃ dukkhaṃ*), (12) discontent is caused by another (*paraṃ kataṃ dukkhaṃ*), (13) discontent is caused by both oneself and another (*sayaṃ katañ ca paraṃ katañ ca hoti*), or (14) discontent, being caused neither by oneself nor by another, arises spontaneously (*asayaṃkāram aparaṃkāram adhiccasamuppannaṃ dukkhaṃ*)." Different scholars have offered different explanations for why the Buddha chose not to indicate whether he agreed or disagreed with those fourteen statements.

5.1. *T. R. V. Murti's explanation*

According to Murti, the Buddha's refusal to answer these questions was grounded in his realization that the categories of Reason, which deal with polar opposites such as identity versus difference, and existence versus nonexistence, are incapable of capturing the nature of the Absolute. Thus he says

> The formulation of the problems in the thesis-antithesis form is itself evidence of the awareness of the conflict in Reason. That the conflict is not on the empirical level and so not capable of being settled by appeal to facts is realised by the Buddha when he declares them insoluble. Reason involves itself in deep and interminable conflict when it tries to to beyond phenomena to seek their ultimate ground. Speculative metaphysics provokes not only difference but also opposition; if one theorist says 'yes' to a question, the other says 'no' to the same. ... [The Buddha] is conscious of the interminable nature of the conflict, and resolves it by rising to the higher standpoint of criticism. Dialectic was born. To Buddha, then, belongs the honour of having discovered the Dialectic long before anything approximating to it was formulated in the West. ... Criticism is deliverance of the human mind from all entanglements and passions (Murti, 1960, pp. 40–41).

> The questions are about the Unconditioned. Buddha is alive, unlike other philosophers, to the insuperable difficulties (*ādīnavam sampassamāno*) in conceiving the Transcendent in terms of the empirical. ... [The Tathāgato] is deep and unfathomable like the ocean. To say with regard to the ocean that it begins here or that it does not, etc., would be a piece of irrelevance. Likewise, the Tathāgata, as the totality of things, is beyond predication.

5.2. *David Kalupahana's explanation*

David Kalupahana argues that the Buddha remained silent on these issues because he accepted only what could be experienced through the senses, whereas these fourteen propositions dealt with matters that could not be decided by sensual experience.

Since no answer based on experience is possible, the Buddha remained silent when pressed for an answer and maintained that the questions as to whether the *tathāgata* exists (*hoti*) or arises (*uppajjati*), does not exist or does not arise, both or neither, do not fit the case (*na upeti*) (Kalupahana, 1976, p. 157).

Kalupahana rejects Murti's notion that the Buddha's silence stemmed from his unwillingness to attribute categories to the Absolute. There is no textual justification in the Pāḷi Canon for Murti's contention that the Buddha was concerned with questions of the Absolute or with anything Transcendental. Rather, says Kalupahana, the Buddha realized that our only source of knowledge is our own perfectly ordinary experience of the everyday world, and we have no means of going beyond the limitations of that experience. Kalupahana then goes on to outline three objections that the Buddha has to what Kalupahana calls "metaphysical" knowledge. These three objections are: (1) Metaphysical theories have no basis in our ordinary experience, and they cannot be verified by empirical investigation. (2) Metaphysicians attempt to determine in advance what must be true and ignore what their senses tell them is true. (3) Metaphysical propositions are strings of words that may appear meaningful because they conform to rules of grammar, but turn out to be meaningless when examined more closely.

This is the Logical Positivist criticism of metaphysics and is found in the early Buddhist texts. ... As the Logical Positivists themselves maintain, these metaphysical statements are meaningless because they are not verified in experience (Kalupahana, 1976, p. 158).

Kalupahana's proof text for this Positivist anti-metaphysical stance is the Sabba-sutta of the Saṃyutta-nikāya:

Monks, I will teach you 'everything'. Listen to it. What, monks, is 'everything'? Eye and material form, ear and sound, nose and odor, tongue and taste, body and tangible objects, mind and mental objects. These are called 'everything'. Monks, he who would

say: "I will reject this *everything* and proclaim another *everything*," he may certainly have a theory. But when questioned, he would not be able to answer and would, moreover, be subject to vexation. Why? Because it would not be within the range of experience (*avisaya*) (Kalupahana, 1976, p. 158).

5.3. *The Buddha's explanation*

Both Murti and Kalupahana can be seen to have gratuitously offered an anachronistic interpretation of the Buddha's silence. One need not, however, find exotic modern interpretations of the Buddha's silence, since the very texts in which his refusal to answer questions is reported also report his own explanation of why he chose to remain silent on certain issues. The Buddha's own explanation for why he had not determined the answers to these fourteen questions is given, among other places, in the Poṭṭhapādasutta of the Dīghanikāya:

"Why, venerable sir, has the Lord not determined?"
"Because, Poṭṭhapāda, this is not connected to a purpose, nor is it connected to virtue, nor is it connected with the life of purity, nor does it lead to humility, nor to dispassion, nor to cessation, nor to tranquility, nor to superior understanding, nor to supreme awakening, nor to nirvana. Therefore, I have not determined."
"What has the Lord determined, Venerable sir?"
"I have determined that this is discontent, this is the cause of discontent, this is the cessation of discontent, and this is the path leading to the cessation of discontent."[26]

The Buddha then concludes that he has taught the Four Noble Truths because these truths are connected to a purpose, are connected to virtue, are connected with the life of purity, do lead to humility, and dispassion, and cessation, and tranquility, and superior understanding, and supreme awakening, and nirvana.

In the Cuḷa-Māḷuṅkyasutta of the Majjhimanikāya the Buddha gives an answer very much like the one he gave to Poṭṭhapāda. But in this sutta he adds:

Living the life of purity does not depend on the view that the world is eternal, nor does it depend on the view that the world is not eternal. Whether or not the world is eternal or not eternal, there definitely is birth, growing old, dying, grief, sorrow, suffering, lamentation and despair. And I have explained how to bring those things to an end here and now.

He then applies exactly this same formula to the other thirteen questions. The evidence of these two passages supports the conclusion that

the Buddha did not answer these questions for the simple reason that they are not relevant to the cultivation of good character and the quest for an end to discontent. But this does not indicate a commitment either to Murti's Absolutism or to Kalupahana's Logical Positivism.

A somewhat more elaborate answer can be found in the Saṃyuttanikāya 4.391. There the Buddha also says he has no answers to these fourteen questions. When asked why he does not determine the answer, he replies:

> Let me ask you what is the reason why the wandering ascetics with other views try to answer these questions, whereas Gotama the recluse does not try to answer them. The reason is that other wandering ascetics think that the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind either belong to them or are their selves or are part of their selves. But the Tathāgata, being a fully awakened Arahant, does not think of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body or mind as belonging to him, nor does he think of them "These are my self." The Tathāgata, unlike other wandering ascetics, also does not regard feelings, perception, mentality or awareness as things that belong to him or as being himself or as being part of himself. There is nothing about which the Tathāgata says "This is mine. This is I. This is my self."

The argument of this latter passage could be summarized as follows: Someone who thinks of the living body or the mind as the self or as belonging to the self recognizes that the body and mind are both impermanent. Those who think in this way then become filled with fear that they will cease to exist. Because they are filled with a desire to live (*jīvitumkāma*) and a desire not to die (*amaritukāma*), they believe what they want to believe: there is life after death. Some people, on the other hand, are attached to pleasures and wish to pursue pleasures without regard to how their actions will affect other living beings. These people, who choose not to be responsible in their actions, believe what they want to believe: there is no life after death. The Tathāgata, on the other hand, realizes that all discontent arises from ignorance, which takes the form of identifying the body and the mind as the self. When this identification comes to an end, so does all discontent. One can then face all changes and all kinds of experience with calm and dignity.

The Saṃyuttanikāya passage would suggest that the Buddha's reason for avoiding giving answers to the celebrated fourteen questions was not because the questions presupposed the existence of polar opposites that could be subsumed under an all-embracing Absolute,

nor because he was a pure empiricist who disdained metaphysics, but rather because he recognized that all possible answers to these questions presuppose the existence of an enduring self. But if the existence of such a self is denied, then no predicates can truly be predicated of it. If no unicorns exist, then it is as false to say "The unicorn is white" as it is to say "The unicorn is not white." In other words, refusing to give answers to the fourteen questions was the Buddha's way of denying the existence of an enduring self.

When it is recalled that denying the existence of an enduring self was also very much the principal task of both the ābhidarmikas and Nāgārjuna, it turns out that (1) the ābhidharmikas need not be seen as in any way spoiling or misconstruing the basic teachings of the Buddha, and (2) Nāgārjuna need not be seen as taking any kind of radical turn either from the Buddha or from the ābhidharmikas. On the contrary, the Buddha, the ābhidharmikas and Nāgārjuna appear to be following almost exactly the same philosophical trajectory.

6. CONCLUSION

In the preface of his study of Western interpretations of Nāgārjuna, Andrew P. Tuck (1990, p. v) makes the claim that it is a "commonplace of contemporary scholarship" that the interpretations that scholars give of texts are "isogetical: they reveal far more about the views of scholars and their scholarly eras than exegesis is said to do." It should be noted that the primary purpose of Tuck's study is not to offer a history of scholarship on Nāgārjuna, but rather to use some recent studies of Nāgārjuna as illustrations of the process of isogesis at work. Isogesis is, according to Tuck (p. 10), a largely unconscious process whereby an interpreter unwittingly reads a set of biases and unexamined presuppositions into a text; these prejudices are said to stem from such sources as the interpreter's basic temperament as well as from all kinds of social conditioning and indoctrination. This being the focal interest of his work, Tuck naturally (and presumably deliberately) gives far more attention to Stcherbatsky and Murti, whose work serves better to illustrate his thesis, than to scholars such as Schayer, in whose work the phenomenon of isogesis is somewhat less in evidence. Tuck gives no mention at all to the important contributions of

Ruegg, Lindtner and Bhattacharya, who appear to come very close to the ideal of detached and scientific objectivity in scholarship that Tuck suggests is little more than an ideological remnant of nineteenth century mythology promoted by such thinkers are Schleiermacher and Dilthey.

In light of what was seen above in Section 4, it may be tempting to agree with Tuck's claim that twentieth century scholarship on Nāgārjuna reveals much more about the preoccupations of twentieth century intellectuals than about Nāgārjuna and his contemporaries, for it certainly does appear to be the case that the interpretations of Nāgārjuna's thought presented by Stcherbatsky, Murti, Warder, Kalupahana, Magliola, Dilworth and Huntington all reflect trends in nineteenth and twentieth century European thinking far more than they reflect trends in classical Indian thought. That notwithstanding, we have seen plenty of counter-evidence to Tuck's thesis as well; the works of Schayer, Robinson, Bhattacharya, Ruegg and Williams all seem far more exegetical than isogetical, and, except for the fact that they all refer to and find fault with post-Kantian interpretations, they bear few characteristics that would identify them as works of the twentieth century.[27]

On looking at trends in twentieth century scholarship on Nāgārjuna, one can discern two fairly distinct styles, which seem to correspond to the traditional approaches known as exegesis and hemeneutics. Roughly speaking, the former attempts to discover what a text meant in the time it was written, while the latter attempts to find the meaning of a text for the time in which the interpreter lives. Exegesis tends to be confined mostly to the accumulation and ordering of philological, historical and textual data, while hermeneutics attempts to make those data not only intelligible but also relevant to the concerns of people in the present. These two traditional approaches begin with somewhat different questions and therefore yield somewhat different results. As long as scholars are clear in their own minds about which of these approaches they are taking and which approach other scholars are taking, there is no reason for those who take one approach to decry the work done by those who take the other. It is as pointless to accuse the historian of being a bad philosopher as to accuse the philosopher or the preacher of being a bad historian.

What I have attempted to do in the present study, however, is not to adjudicate in the disputes that have occasionally erupted between historical-minded exegetes and philosophically engaged interpreters. Rather, what I have tried to do is simply to show that a close look at Nāgārjuna's work in the context in which it was written reveals that Nāgārjuna put forth a number of fallacious arguments. In particular, I have tried to show that he made frequent use of the fallacy of equivocation. Owing to his use of this and other fallacies, the conclusions he puts forth do not necessarily follow from the evidence he adduces for them. An attempt has been made to show that this fallaciousness in Nāgārjuna's writing has been seen by some modern interpreters not as a vice but as a rather interesting virtue; for it has been seen by some as a clue that Nāgārjuna deliberately rejected standard logic in favour of a deviant logic by which one might simultaneously hold two contradictory views with impunity. While such an hypothesis, if true, might give modern proponents of deviant logic, or to outright opponents of logic of any kind, the sort of comfort that attends finding famous and highly respected antecedents to one's own position, I contend that the hypothesis is in fact unlikely to be true. On the contrary, it appears to me on examining the textual evidence that Nāgārjuna had a set of definitely stated doctrines for which he was trying to produce a systematically arranged set of rational arguments. That he failed in this task does not diminish his importance within the history of Buddhist philosophy. It merely shows him to have been a thinker who displayed about the same degree of fallibility as most other human beings. But being an imperfect philosopher need not at all reduce Nāgārjuna's appeal, either to historians of philosophy or to philosophers themselves.

APPENDIX

A. TRANSLATIONS OF NĀGĀRJUNA'S MŪLA-MADHYAMAKA-KĀRIKĀ CHAPTER 15

In order to illustrate the different strategies that different modern translators have taken in handling Nāgārjuna's mercurial use of the term "svabhāva," the verses of chapter 15 are given below, along with

the translations found in Streng (1967), Inada (1970), Sprung (1979) and Kalupahana (1986), as well as my translation. Schayer's (1931, pp. 55—80) rendering does not appear here, because he chose to avoid altogether translating the key terms, preferring simply to import the Sanskrit terms "bhāva", "svabhāva", "abhāva", "parabhāva" and "prakṛti" into his German translation; his title for the fifteenth chapter of the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā*, however, is 'Kritik der Lehre von dem absoluten Sein,' suggesting that he took the most important sense of "svabhāva" under consideration to be that of unconditioned being.

na saṃbhavaḥ svabhāvasya yuktaḥ pratyayahetubhiḥ
hetupratyayasaṃbhūtaḥ svabhāvaḥ kṛtako bhavet || 1 |

Streng: The production of a self-existent thing by a conditioning cause is not possible, [for,] being produced through dependence on a cause, a self-existent thing would be "something which is produced."

Inada: The rise of self-nature by relational and causal conditions is not justifiable. For, such a self-nature will have a character of being made or manipulated.

Sprung: The genesis of a self-existent nature from causes and conditions is not intelligible. A self-existent nature which arises from causes and conditions would be something created.

Kalupahana: The occurrence of self-nature through causes and conditions is not proper. Self-nature that has occurred as a result of causes and conditions would be something that is made.

Hayes: Birth of an independent thing from causes and conditions is not reasonable. An independent thing born from causes and conditions would be a fabrication.

svabhāvaḥ kṛtako nāma bhaviṣyati punaḥ kathaṃ
akṛtimaḥ svabhāvo hi nirapekṣaḥ paratra ca || 2 ||

Streng: How, indeed, will a self-existent thing *become* "something which is produced"? Certainly, a self-existent thing

[by definition] is "not produced" and is independent of anything else.

Inada: How is it possible for the self-nature to take on the character of being made? For, indeed, the self-nature refers to something which cannot be made and has no mutual correspondence with something else.

Sprung: How can a self-existent nature be something created? Self-existent nature is not created nor is it dependent on anything other than itself.

Kalupahana: Again, how could there be a self-nature that is made? Indeed, an unmade self-nature is also non-contingent upon another.

Hayes: But how could an independent thing be called a fabrication, given that an independent thing is not a fabrication and is independent of anything else?

kutaḥ svabhāvasyābhāve parabhāvo bhaviṣyati
svabhāvaḥ parabhāvasya parabhāvo hi kathyate || 3 ||

Steng: If there is an absence of a self-existent thing, how will an other-existent thing come into being? Certainly the self-existence of an other-existent thing is called "other-existence."

Inada: Where self-nature is non-existent, how could there be an extended nature? For, indeed, a self-nature which has the nature of being extended will be called an extended nature.

Sprung: If there is no self-existence, how can there be existence of otherness? For it is the self-existence of the existence of otherness which is called 'existence of otherness'.

Kalupahana: In the absence of self-nature, whence can there be other-nature? For, self-nature of other-nature is called other-nature.

Hayes: How, in the absence of an identifiable thing, could there be a difference, given that the identity of a different thing is called a differentia?

svabhāvaparabhāvābhyām ṛte bhāvaḥ kutaḥ punaḥ
svabhāva parabhāve vā sati bhāvo hi sidhyati || 4 ||

Streng: Further, how can a thing [exist] without either self-existence or other-existence? If either self-existence or other-existence exist, then an existing thing, indeed, would be proved.

Inada: Again, separated from self-nature and extended nature, how could existence be? For, indeed, existence establishes itself in virtue of either self-nature or extended nature.

Sprung: How can there be an entity apart from self-existence and other-existence? If there is either self-existence or other-existence entities are already established.

Kalupahana: Without self-nature and other-nature, whence can there be an existent? For, the existent is established only when there is self-nature or other-nature.

Hayes: How can there be existence without either independence or dependence, given that existence is established when there is either independence or dependence?

bhāvasya ced aprasiddhir abhāvo naiva sidhyati
bhāvasya hy anyathābhāvam abhāvaṃ bruvate janāḥ || 5 ||

Streng: If there is no proof of an existent thing, then a non-existent thing cannot be proved. Since people call the other-existence of an existent thing a "non-existent" thing.

Inada: If existence does not come to be (i.e., does not establish itself), then certainly non-existence does not also. For, indeed, people speak of existence in its varying nature as non-existence.

Sprung: If existence is not accepted, non-existence cannot be established. Because people say that non-existence is being other than existence.

Kalupahana: When the existent is not established, the non-existent is also not established. It is, indeed, the change of the existent that people generally call the non-existent.

Hayes: If an existent is not established, an absence is certainly

not established, given that people call the change of state of an existent its ceasing to be present.

svabhāvaṃ parabhāvaṃ ca bhāvaṃ cābhāvam eva ca
ye paśyanti na paśyanti te tattvaṃ buddhaśāsane || 6 ||

Streng: Those who perceive self-existence and other-existence, and an existent thing and a non-existent thing, do not perceive the true nature of the Buddha's teaching.

Inada: Those who see (i.e., try to understand) the concepts of self-nature, extended nature, existence, or non-existence do not perceive the real truth in the Buddha's teaching.

Sprung: Those who think in terms of self-existence, other-existence, existence and non-existence do not grasp the truth of the Buddha's teaching.

Kalupahana: Those who perceive self-nature as well as other-nature, existence as well as non-existence, they do not perceive the truth embodied in the Buddha's message.

Hayes: They who perceive identity, difference, presence and absence do not perceive the truth in the Buddha's instruction.

kātyāyanāvavāde cāstīti nāstīti cobhayaṃ
pratiṣiddhaṃ bhagavatā bhāvābhāvavibhāvinā || 7 ||

Streng: In "The Instruction to Kātyāyana" both "it is" and "it is not" are opposed by the Glorious One, who has ascertained the meaning of "existent" and "non-existent."

Inada: According to the Instructions to Kātyāyana, the two views of the world in terms of being and non-being were criticized by the Buddha for similarly admitting the bifurcation of entities into existence and non-existence.

Sprung: In the ***Kātyāyanāvavāda Sūtra***, the illustrious one, who comprehends existence and non-existence, repudiated both thoughts: that something is that something is not.

Kalupahana: In the admonition to Kātyāyana, the two theories [implying] 'exists' and 'does not exist' have been refuted

	by the Blessed One who is adept in existence as well as in non-existence.
Hayes:	In the *Kātyāyanāvavāda* the Lord, who clearly saw presence and absence, denied both the view that one exists and the view that one does not exist.

yady astitvaṃ prakṛtyā syān na bhaved asya nāstitā
prakṛter anyathābhāvo na hi jatūpapadyate || 8 ||

Streng:	If there would be an existent thing by its own nature, there could not be "non-existence" of that [thing]. Certainly an existent thing different from its own nature would never obtain.
Inada:	If existence is in virtue of primal nature, then its non-existence does not follow. For, indeed, a varying character of a primal nature is not possible at all.
Sprung:	If it is the nature of something to exist, it cannot cease to exist. Real change of the nature of something is not logically possible.
Kalupahana:	If existence were to be in terms of primal nature, then there would not be its non-existence. A change of primal nature is certainly not appropriate.
Hayes:	If a thing were to exist by nature, then it could not fail to exist, for the change of state of a nature is certainly not possible.

prakṛtau kasya cāsatyām anyathātvaṃ bhaviṣyati
prakṛtau kasya satyām anyathātvaṃ bhaviṣyati || 9 ||

Streng:	[An opponent asks:] If there is no basic self-nature, of what will there be "otherness"? [Nāgārjuna answers:] If there is basic self-nature, of what will there be "otherness"?
Inada:	If primal nature does not exist, what will possess the varying character? If, on the other hand, primal nature does exist, what then will possess the varying character?
Sprung:	If things have no inherent nature what is it that will

change? If things have an inherent nature what is it that will change?

Kalupahana: When primal nature is not-existent, whose change would there be? When primal nature is existent, whose change would there be?

Hayes: And in the absence of a nature, what can undergo the process of change? On the other hand, if a nature is present, what can undergo the process of change?

astīti śaśvatagrāho nāstīti ucchedadarśanaṃ
tasmād astitvanāstitve nāśrīyeta vicakṣaṇaḥ || 10 ||

Streng: "It is" is a notion of eternity. "It is not" is a nihilistic view. Therefore, one who is wise does ot have recourse to "being" or "non-being".

Inada: Existing is the grasping of permanency (i.e., permanent characteristics) and non-existence the perception of disruption. (As these functions are not strictly possible), the wise should not rely upon (the concepts of) existence and non-existence.

Sprung: To say 'things are in being' is the eternalist view; to say 'Things are not in being' is the naturalist view. Therefore thinking man should not resort to the twin beliefs in existence and non-existence.

Kalupahana: "Exists" implies grasping after eternalism. 'Does not exist' implies the philosophy of annihilation. Therefore, a discerning person should not rely upon either existence or non-existence.

Hayes: The notion of perpetuity is that one exists; the notion of destruction is that one fails to exist. Therefore, a wise person should not experience existence or non-existence.

asti yad dhi svabhāvena na tan nāstīti śāśvatam
nāstīdānīm abhūt pūrvam ity ucchedaḥ prasajyate || 11 ||

Streng: That which exists by its own nature is eternal since "it does not not-exist." If it is maintained: "That which existed

before does not exist now," there annihilation would naturally follow.

Inada: It follows that permanency means that existence based on self-nature does not become a non-entity and disruption means that what formerly was existence is now non-existent.

Sprung: What exists by its inherent nature can never not exist: this implies eternalism. What does now not exist but once did: this implies naturalism.

Kalupahana: "Whatever that exists in terms of self-nature, that is not non-existent" implies eternalism. "It does not exist now, but existed before" implies annihilation.

Hayes: Perpetuity follows from believing that that which exists independently (*svabhāvena*) does not fail to exist; destruction follows from believing that that which existed before no longer exists.

B. DIFFICULTIES OF TRANSLATING MMK 15

The various senses in which Nāgārjuna uses the principal equivocal expressions on which his argument is based in MMK 15:1—11 can be seen in Table I. the numbers indicate the verse number of each occurrence. Numbers followed by a star indicate that a synonym of the equivocal expression is used; the words in parentheses indicate which synonym is used in the starred verse.

TABLE I
Usage of key terms in MMK 15

bhāva$_{(P)}$	existence: 4, 10* (*astitva*)
bhāva$_{(L)}$	an existent: 5
abhāva$_{(P)}$	absence: 5, 10* (*nāstitva*)
svabhāva$_{1\,(I)}$	an essence: 3c, 8* (*prakṛti*), 9* (*prakṛti*)
svabhāva$_{1\,(L)}$	an identifiable thing: 3a
svabhāva$_{2\,(P)}$	independence: 4, 6, 11
svabhāva$_{2\,(L)}$	an independent thing: 1, 2
parabhāva$_{1\,(P)}$	difference: 3
parabhāva$_{1\,(I)}$	a differentia: 3
parabhāva$_{1\,(L)}$	another thing: 3
parabhāva$_{2\,(P)}$	dependence: 4, 6

The presence of equivocation makes translating Nāgārjuna's arguments particularly challenging; conversely, the difficulty that one has in

TABLE II
Translation of key terms in MMK 15

Word / Verse	Translator: Inada	Kalupahana	Streng	Sprung
bhāva				
4	existence	existent	thing	entity
5	existence	existent	existent thing	existence
6	existence	existence	existent thing	existence
7	existence	existence	existent	existence
astitva				
8	existence	existence	existent thing	to exist
10	existence	existence	being	existence
abhāva				
5–6	non-existence	non-existent	non-existent thing	non-existence
7	non-existence	non-existent	non-existent	non-existence
nāstitva				
8	non-existence	non-existence	non-existence	cease to exist
10	non-existence	non-existence	non-being	non-existence
svabhāva				
1, 2	self-nature	self-nature	self-existent thing	self-existent nature
3, 4, 6	self-nature	self-nature	self-existence	self-existence
11	self-nature	self-nature	own nature	inherent nature
prakṛti				
8	primal nature	primal nature	own nature	nature
9	primal nature	primal nature	basic self-nature	inherent nature
parabhāva				
3a	extended nature	other-nature	other-existent thing	existence of otherness
3c	extended nature	other-nature	other-existence	existence of otherness
4, 6	extended nature	other-nature	other-existence	other-existence
anyathābhāva				
5	varying nature	change of the existent	other-existence	being other
8	varying character	change	existent thing other than	real change
9	varying character	change	otherness	real change

arriving at a translation that captures the apparent flow of the argument shold alert one to the presence of equivocation or other logical fallacies. The difficulty that different translators have had rendering these terms is reflected in Table II. Note the different strategies that the translators have taken.

— Inada has opted to render each Sanskrit term by the same English phrase, regardless of context; following the custom long honoured by Tibetan translators, he has not hesitated to coin new calque phrases (self-nature, primal nature, extended nature), the meanings of which are not always obvious to a native speaker of English.

— Kalupahana has also used calque translations for "svabhāva" and "parabhāva".

— Streng and Sprung have attempted to show the multiplicity of meanings attached to several terms; they have also shown, at least implicitly, that the term "prakṛti" is synonymous with one of the meanings of "svabhāva."

— None of the translators has drawn sufficient attention to the extent to which Nāgārjuna's equivocation on key terms constitutes an informal fallacy that undermines the validity of his argumentation.

NOTES

[1] This essay evolved out of a set of lectures delivered to a seminar course at McGill University in the 1991 autumn term. My understanding of Nāgārjuna has benefited from the lively discussion of the twelve students who participated in those seminars. Improvements were also made as a result of later comments made by Drs. Jan Nattier and Brendan Gillon and by Mr. Raynald Prévèreau, all of whom carefully read the penultimate draft of this presentation.

[2] See Paul Williams (1989, pp. 60—63) for a lucid presentation of the standard view that Nāgārjuna's arguments were directed against the ābhidharmika notion of the *svabhāva*. Richard Robinson (1972a) also drew attention to the fact that the philosophical systems at which Nāgārjuna's arguments were apparently directed "have not considered themselves refuted."

[3] This summary is my own attempt at reconstructing Nāgārjuna's reasoning. It is *not* an attempt to recapitulate what anyone in the commentarial tradition has said, although much of what I say here has in fact been said by others.

[4] Schayer (1931, pp. 55—57, note 41) outlines the following four distinct senses of the term "svabhāva." First, it can stand for an essence (*svo bhāvaḥ*, "*Wesenseigenshaft im Gegensatz zum Accidens*"), as when Candrakīrti defines it as "yo dharmo yaṃ padārthaṃ na vyabhicarati sa tasya svabhāvaḥ" (That property which never leaves a thing is its essence). Heat, for example, is the essence of fire. This corresponds to my

svabhāva$_1$. Second, "svabhāva" can be used in the sense of a distinctive characteristic (*svalakṣaṇa*, "*individuelle Eigenmarkmal*"), that is a mark that distinguishes its possessor from all things that do not possess that mark; this, says Schayer, is how the term was used by ābhidharmikas. Third, "svabhāva" can be used as a synonym for "prakṛti," the unchanging, eternal substratum of all changeable things ("unveränderlichen, ewigen Substrats aller Veränderungen"). And finally, "svabhāva" can be used in the sense of absolute, not relative being (*svato bhāva*, "*das absolute, nicht relative Sein*"), that is, being that depends on nothing. This corresponds to my svabhāva$_2$. In section 3.2 below, I shall say more about the senses that the word "svabhāva" can have.

[5] The Kāśikā-vṛtti to Pāṇini-sūtra 3.1.16 reads "bhāve vācye dhātor ghañpratyayo bhavati." (The suffix GHaÑ occurs after the verbal root when a performance is to be expressed.)

[6] The Kāśikā-vṛtti to Pāṇini-sūtra 3.2.121 reads "halantād dhātoḥ karaṇādhikaraṇayor ghañ-pratyayo bhavati." (The suffix GHaÑ occurs after a verbal root ending in a consonant in the sense of an instrument or a location.)

[7] The fifteenth chapter of *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* is called Bhāvābhāvaparīkṣā (Examination of presence and absence) in the commentary named *Akutobhayā* and in the commentaries of Buddhapālita (early 6th century?), Bhāvaviveka (late sixth century?) and Avalokitavrata (7th century?). In the commentary of Candrakīrti (mid-7th century?), however, the chapter is entitled svabhāva-parīkṣā (Examination of Identity).

[8] That there is no *bhāva*, it will be recalled, was the content of Theorem 1 discussed above on page 7.

[9] Kalupahana (1986, p. 5) goes so far as to say that the entire MMK is "a superb commentary on the Buddha's own *Kaccāyanagotta-sutta*, a commentary in which Nāgārjuna upholds every statement made by the Buddha in the discourse, bringing together more material from the other discourses as well, and then clearing the water muddied by the speculations of some of the metaphysicians of the later Buddhist tradition." This many be an overstatement of the importance of the Kātyāyanāvavāda to the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* as a whole, but certainly the allusion to that text in this passage offers an important clue to the senses in which Nāgārjuna may be using some of his key terms. It is worth noting, however, that the Kātyāyanāvavāda does not use the terms "svabhāva" and "parabhāva" — adding those terms to the list of perceptions that obstruct the perception of the Buddha's teaching is Nāgārjuna's innovation.

[10] Candrakīrti says in his commentary to this verse (Pāṇḍeya, 1988, p. 263): "idaṃ ca sūtraṃ sarvanikāyeṣu paṭhyate. tasmād āgamāt yathopavarṇitāyāś copapatter nārhati prājñaḥ svabhāvaparabhāvabhāvābhavadarśanaṃ tathāgatavacanād atyantaviruddham āsthātum, bhagavatā pratiṣiddhatvāt." (This *sūtra* is recited in all [Buddhist] sects. Because of that tradition and because of the reasoning explained in such detail, a wise person cannot adopt the views of existence, non-existence, identity and difference which are completely opposed to the words of the Tathāgata, because the Lord has ruled them out.) See Heinz Bechert (1973) for a discussion of the term "nikāya" used in the sense of a sect with its own distinct set of texts recognized as authoritative.

[11] The version cited by Candrakīrti reads "the world" (*lokaḥ*) instead of "all things" (*sarvam*), but the message is about the same.

[12] In some of its applications, the English word "identity" still retains the meaning of

its Latin ancestor "identitas," which means sameness, the state of being the same (*idem*).

[13] Among the numerous studies that concentrate on the logical implications of the tetralemma are those by J. F. Staal (1976), David Seyfort Ruegg (1977), Sitansu Chakrabarti (1980), F. J. Hoffman (1982), Guy Bugault (1983), Yu-Kwan Ng (1987), Brian Galloway (1989), and Tom Tillemans (1992).

[14] It must be remembered, for example, that Nāgārjuna, unlike the Buddha, was undoubtedly familiar with both Pāṇini and Patañjali and possibly with other representatives of the grammatical tradition that provided classical India with its sharpest tools of conceptual analysis. More discussion about Nāgārjuna's debt to the grammarians will be presented below in Section 4.6.

[15] I have deliberately said in several passages of this paper that Nāgārjuna was *apparently* or *allegedly* trying to show the groundlessness of contemporary ābhidharmika thinking. It is certainly the consensus of Mahāyāna tradition, and the consensus also of modern scholarship, that the butt of Nāgārjuna's criticisms were those people who studied the abhidharma literature. That this was the case, however, is certainly nothing that can be taken for granted. And indeed, unless one is quite determined to find evidence in Nāgārjuna's writings of an antagonism towards the scholasticism that was beginning to take form in the Buddhism of his day, it is not at all obvious that such evidence really exists; and in the absence of solid evidence, there is no reason for assuming that his attitude was antagonistic. The question of Nāgārjuna's attitude towards scholasticism, or towards what some people later would contemptuously call Hīnayāna, as far as I can see, is still quite open.

[16] For a much more detailed analysis than I can offer here of the modern philosophical trends that underly some modern interpretations of Nāgārjuna's thought, please see the interesting study by Andrew P. Tuck (1990).

[17] It is possible that there is an element of wishful thinking in this irenic interpretation of Nāgārjuna. On the other hand, his *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* is remarkably free of the uncharitable caricatures of Brahmans and rival *śramaṇa* teachers that fill the pages of the Pāḷi canon, and it is likewise free of the tedious belittling of the achievements of the earlier *śrāvakas* that characterizes so much of the Mahāyāna literature, where the pre-Mahāyāna tends to be dismissed as so much worthless Hīnayāna. Insofar as Nāgārjuna apparently managed to be a Buddhist without being especially anti-Buddhist, and managed as well to be a general Buddhist without obvious partisanship to any particular school, his writings certainly do not rule out the possibility of the kind of pacific interpretation that many modern people want to give it.

[18] The parallelism between the Greek discussion of method and the Indian discussion of paths is more apparent when one recalls that the word "method" comes into English from the French "méthode" from the Latin "methodus" from the Greek "methodos", a compound of "meta" (after, according to) and "hodos" (path, way).

[19] Stcherbatsky was not alone in this view. As Tillemans (1992) has recently reminded us, Stcherbatsky's scholarly rival La Vallée Poussin (1933, p. 59) also held the view that Nāgārjuna's arguments were nothing more than "une méthode de purification de l'esprit" designed to facilitate entry into yogic trance.

[20] "... mā anussavena mā paramparāya mā piṭakasampadānena mā takkahetu mā nayahetu mā ākāraparivitakkena mā diṭṭhinijjhānakkhantiyā mā bhavyarūpatāya mā samaṇo no garū ti ..." (Morris, 1885, p. 195).

[21] As anyone who is at home with Deconstructive criticism will readily see, it is a plot that lies outside my bailiwick. I have relied primarily on what strikes me as a particularly clear account by M. H. Abrams (1988b) who also provides a very cogent criticism of this school of literary criticism (1988a). I also benefited from accounts by Carl A. Raschke (1990) and Huston Smith (1990) and from conversations with several colleagues (notably David Seljak, Gregory Baum, Richard Cooper and Eric Beresford) who have studied this area more thoroughly than I. Credit for anything of value in the account that follows is due to the above named sources. Any egregious blunders are of my own creation.

[22] Magliola makes a distinction between the logocentric modes of Chan and Zen — those masters and teachers, such as D. T. Suzuki, who adopted essentially Yogācāra teachings and saw meditation as a preparatory exercise to ready the mind for an intuitive experience of the Absolute — and what he calls the "differential" modes of Chan and Zen, which successfully preserved the truly nonbinary nature of Nāgārjuna's deconstruction.

[23] Huntington (1989, pp. 25—32) also provides a brief but useful summary and critique of the stages through which modern Western scholarship has gone in its interpretation of Nāgārjuna. For an excellently written and balanced review of Huntington's work in particular and postmodernist approaches to Mādhyamika in general, see Williams (1991).

[24] Similarly, hardly any modern interpreter has paid sufficient attention to Candrakīrti's indebtedness to the grammarian Bhartṛhari, for whom the ultimate reality, Brahman, was the very power of language itself. It was Bhratṛhari's insight that language is a single innate power from which emerges the whole diversity of the world of experience; we experience the world as we do because we think of the world as we do, and we think of the world as we do because we speak of the world as we do. The world of diversity, according to Bhartṛhari, is located entirely within thought, which is located entirely within the capacity for language. Bhartṛhari wrote extensively to show that all the basic categories of analysis used by grammarians — words, case endings, etc. — are simply tools of analysis that must be used only when one fails to understand the meaning of the basic unit of speech, the sentence. The categories of grammar, and therefore the categories of analytic thought, are merely heuristic devices that must be employed to reveal the underlying unity of speech and the corresponding unity of being.

[25] Compare the sequence of terms in the *pratītyasamutpāda* formula: *tṛṣṇāpratyayam upādānam. upādānapratyayaḥ bhavaḥ.*

[26] Dīghanikāya 9.28: Kasmā bhante Bhagavatā avyākatan ti. Na h' etaṃ Poṭṭhapāda attha-saṃhitaṃ na dhamma-saṃhitaṃ na ādibrahmacariyakaṃ, na nibbidāya na viragāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na saṃbodhāya na nibbānāya saṃvattati. Tasmā taṃ mayā avyākatan ti. (29) Kim pana bhante Bhagavatā vyākatan ti. Idam dukkhan ti Poṭṭhapāda mayā vyākataṃ Ayaṃ dukkha-samudayo ti kho Poṭṭhapāda mayā vyākatam. Ayaṃ dukkha-nirodho ti kho Poṭṭhapāda mayā vyākataṃ. Ayaṃ dukkha-nirodhagāminī patipadā ti kho Poṭṭhapāda mayā vyākatan ti.

[27] In addition to works discussed in the body of this paper, one could add the following works to the list of those what are purely exegetical: Christian Lindtner (1986; 1987) and David seyfort Ruegg (1981; 1990).

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JOHN A. TABER

ON NĀGĀRJUNA'S SO-CALLED FALLACIES: A COMPARATIVE APPROACH

In a recent contribution to the *Journal of Indian Philosophy* Richard Hayes examines what he takes to be certain fallacies in the argumentation of Nāgārjuna's *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (MMK).[1] The principal type of fallacy that Hayes believes himself to have identified is a fallacy of equivocation in which the term *svabhāva* is used in different senses in the premises and conclusions of arguments. While Hayes mentions at least one other fallacy that he believes Nāgārjuna to commit in the MMK, it is the use of *svabhāva* upon which he focuses and which indeed would be devastating to Nāgārjuna's philosophy were it in fact a fallacy. I shall argue in this paper, however, that Nāgārjuna employs *svabhāva* univocally, in the sense of 'nature', 'essence' or more exactly (but awkwardly), 'own-being', in the arguments in question. Moreover, I shall hold that the arguments that turn on this concept, in particular those in MMK I and XV, are not without plausibility, though they are certainly not immune to criticism, either.

In a final section of the paper I shall consider a further fallacy pointed out by Hayes as well as by a number of other scholars, which I refer to as "the principle of coexisting counterparts." In attempting to show that this, too, is not really a fallacy – at least not a fallacy in the way Nāgārjuna employs it in the MMK – I shall be obliged to consider the question of the interpretation of Nāgārjuna's philosophy as a whole.

Throughout the discussion I shall find it helpful to make references to other Western and Asian philosophical traditions. I hope that the justification of a comparative methodology will be self-evident in each case.

1

Let us begin our discussion as Hayes does, with a consideration of MMK I.3:

na svato nāpi parato na dvābhyāṃ nāpy ahetutaḥ /
utpannā jātu vidyante bhāvāḥ kvacana kecana//

No entities ever arise either from themselves, from other things, both from themselves and other things, or from no cause at all.

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That is to say, nothing, no entity (*bhāva*), arises, is caused to exist, in any way.

Nāgārjuna's refutation of causation in the first chapter of the MMK is usually taken to be directed against Abhidharma (Sarvāstivāda) philosophy. One of the principal tenets of Abhidharma thought is that all things are constantly coming into and passing out of existence – all is in flux – according to causal laws. Indeed, the next verse will list the four types of causal condition (*pratyaya*) recognized in Abhidharma texts;[2] subsequent verses will offer specific refutations of each of those types. Yet MMK I.3, the statement that begins the discussion, does not in any obvious way refer to Buddhist theories. Rather, it critiques the notion of cause in the most general sense. Whatever one's specific theory of causation may be, one will have to consider the effect either the same, different from, both the same and different from, or neither the same nor different from the cause.

In fact, it is certain Hindu, not Buddhist, theories from which the two basic alternatives of the tetralemma appear to be drawn. The first alternative is reminiscent of the *satkāryavāda* of Sāṃkhya philosophy.[3] Sāṃkhya held that the effect pre-exists in its cause in an unmanifest state; the emergence of the effect out of the cause – e.g., the emergence of curds from milk – is really just the arising of the effect "from itself" in another form. The second alternative, that the effect arises "from another," sounds much like the Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika *asatkārya-* or *ārambhavāda*, that is, the notion that something new, not already present in the cause, arises from the cause.[4] The new thing that arises out of the cause is, specifically, the whole (*avayavin*), which is conceived in Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika as something more than the sum of its parts. Neither the third nor the fourth alternative is traceable to a historical position; both may have been artificial positions considered by Nāgārjuna merely for the sake of systematic completeness.[5] However, it should be noted that the last view, that things arise completely accidentally, without any cause at all, resembles a view discussed and rejected at Nyāya Sūtra IV.1.22–24.[6,7]

Thus, while Nāgārjuna does specifically raise objections in MMK I against various Buddhist theories of causation, the underlying dynamic of the chapter is the conflict between the two fundamental positions that the effect already exists in some sense prior to its being caused and that it does not, i.e., the positions prominently represented in Indian philosophy by Sāṃkhya and Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika.[8] These two views are pitted against each other throughout. Thus *kārikā* 8: "There cannot be a condition of an existent or a non-existent thing. Of what would a

condition of a non-existent [thing] be? And for something that exists, why is a condition needed?" Similarly, *kārikā* 13 states, "And the effect does not exist in the conditions either collectively or individually; and how could that arise from conditions which doesn't already exist in them?"[9] The objections of the one view are brought to bear against the other so that neither in the end appears feasible. These two views having been allowed to demolish each other, any other position, which must ultimately be a version of the one or the other or a combination of both, or else the patently absurd position that things arise without any cause at all, is refuted.[10]

Assuming that Nāgārjuna has the Sāṃkhya *satkāryavāda* in mind as the first alternative of *kārikā* 3, it seems easy to interpret *kārikā* 5 so that it does not commit the fallacy Hayes sees in it. *Kārikā* 5 reads:

na hi svabhāvo bhāvānāṃ pratyayādiṣu vidyate /
avidyamāne svabhāve parabhāvo na vidyate //.

Hayes offers as his initial translation:

Surely beings have no *svabhāva* when they have causal conditions. And if there is not *svabhāva*, there is no *parabhāva*.

But how should we construe the terms *svabhāva* and *parabhāva*? Hayes suggests that, etymologically, *svabhāva* can mean either 'identity' – that is, literally, *svo bhāvaḥ*, 'own-being' – or else 'causal independence' – i.e., literally, *svataḥ bhāvaḥ*, 'existence from itself'. *Parabhāva* accordingly can mean either 'difference' or 'causal dependence'. He suggests further that the first line of *kārikā* 5 by itself makes better sense if *svabhāva* is construed as 'causal independence', while the second line makes better sense if it is construed as 'identity'. Thus in Hayes's final analysis MMK I.5 should be translated:

Surely beings have no causal independence when they have causal conditions. And if there is no identity, then there is no difference.

When the verse is read in this way, it is evident that the second statement in no way follows from the first; it only appears to in the original Sanskrit if one does not notice the shift in the meaning of *svabhāva*. However, the juxtaposition of the statements suggests that Nāgārjuna thought them to be logically connected. Hence, *kārikā* 5 appears to embody a fallacy.[11]

Now Hayes's construal of *svabhāva* in the first half of *kārikā* 5 as 'causal independence' would seem to be dictated by his construal, at the same time, of the expression *pratyayādiṣu* as a locative absolute, viz., 'when there are causal conditions'. But suppose we were to follow

other translators in taking *pratyayādiṣu* as a simple locative?[12] Then a completely different possibility presents itself, namely, that the first half of *kārikā* 5 is not a hypothetical statement but a categorical one: "There is no identity/own-being/essence of entities *in* the causal conditions . . . ."

That could be taken to mean simply that entities do not exist in their causal conditions prior to arising.[13] Hence, with the first half of the *kārikā* Nāgārjuna would be elaborating his rejection of the Sāṃkhya *satkāryavāda* stated in *kārikā* 3: entities cannot arise "from themselves." That is, they cannot arise from themselves because we do not perceive them in their causes. Causes have altogether different properties from their effects. A lump of clay, for example, may be the cause of a pot, but you can't carry water with a lump of clay![14] Thus cause and effect are certainly different.[15] Construing the first half of *kārikā* 5 as an elaboration of *kārikā* 3 in this way, moreover, allows one to make better sense of the continuative particle *hi* at the beginning of the verse. However, it also allows one to see that *svabhāva* is employed univocally in both statements of the verse, in the sense of 'own-being' or 'essence' or, following Hayes, 'identity'. Having, that is, stated in the first half of the verse that entities do not pre-exist in their causes, Nāgārjuna goes on to say in the second half that nothing different from them exists in them either. If the essence of the effect does not exist in the cause, then neither can that which is different from the effect (*parabhāva*). Hence, things can neither arise from themselves nor from other things. The refutation of the *asatkāryavāda* follows immediately from that of the *satkāryavāda*!

If any fallacy is committed in *kārikā* 5, then, it is not a fallacy of equivocation but rather the kind of fallacy Hayes identifies in *kārikā* 7,[16] namely, the fallacy – if it is a fallacy – that a thing cannot be a certain type unless its counterpart exists simultaneously with it. I shall call this the principle of coexisting counterparts.[17] Various scholars have noted that this principle is applied throughout the MMK. Nāgārjuna employs it here in *kārikā* 5 when he argues that there can be no *other* thing from which an entity arises if the essence of that entity is not already present, in contrast to which something *other* than it can be conceived; in short, if there is no *svabhāva* or "own-being" of the effect pre-existent in the causes, there can be no *parabhāva* or "other-being," either. In *kārikā* 7 Nāgārjuna applies this principle directly to the notion of cause itself: if the effect does not already exist, then nothing could count as its condition; for, it is implied, nothing can be conceived as a causal condition unless in contrast to an effect. So it would seem

that the effect must already exist in order for it to have a condition; a thing and its counterpart must exist simultaneously. But then, as he goes on to point out in *kārikā* 8, why is a condition needed at all? What would it do? Similarly, Nāgārjuna argues essentially in the chapter on time (MMK XIX) that the present is defined only in contrast to the future and the past, in which case past and future must exist now, in the present, in order for there to be a present. But then, obviously, the distinctions of time collapse. And so on.

It seems obvious that this reasoning is fallacious. But what exactly is the defect in it? Different scholars have characterized it differently. Charles Hartshorne suggests that it rests on a failure to see that although one thing exists only in relation to another, the other thing can exist independently of the first. "...I think about Caesar and Caesar is thought about by me. But whereas the relation attributed to me cannot be omitted from the description of me without obvious loss there is no scintilla of evidence that the supposed relation of being thought about by me was in Caesar."[18] He thus terms it "the fallacy of misplaced symmetry." Claus Oetke believes it to rest on a confusion of conditions of predication – what has to be the case for something to be considered an X – with conditions of reality – what has to be the case for something to function as an X. One might have to have the effect in view in order to consider something a cause, but the effect does not already have to be present for it to function as one.[19] Hayes, similarly, suggests that this sort of reasoning (specifically in its application to causation in *kārikā* 7) rests on a failure to distinguish "between saying that a thing exists at all and saying that it exists under a given description."[20]

I shall not quibble with these formulations. They all appear to be more on less on the mark. Yet I prefer the following analysis. The principle of coexisting counterparts appears *prima facie* to ignore the fact that a thing in the first instance is what it is by virtue of its inherent properties and is only secondarily related to its counterparts, whatever those may be.[21] A thing's being related to its counterparts can be said to be contingent in the sense that it derives from more basic properties that define the thing as such as well as other, external circumstances. Thus a dog is something other than a cat. But its being a dog is prior to whatever relation it may have to other creatures; it is a dog by virtue of the properties inherent in it. Only because it has those properties – and a cat has the properties that it has – is it *other* than a cat. Similarly, a woman is a mother of a child only secondarily. First and foremost she is a woman, and it is by virtue of her properties as a woman, as

well as other circumstances, that she is a mother. She does not depend on the child in order to exist as a woman.

Even if one were to conceive of a woman as essentially a bearer of children – as one might think of a seed as essentially the cause of a tree – that would not entail that she can only exist simultaneously with her offspring! This point was understood in Indian philosophy by the Naiyāyikas long before any modern scholars ever considered the matter. At Nyāya Sūtra II.1.8 ff. we find objections raised against the Nyāya concept of *pramāṇa* similar to ones developed in Nāgārjuna's *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*. One objection is that a *pramāṇa* is "not established in any of the three times [past, present, or future] (*traikālyāsiddheḥ*)" with respect to its *prameya* or object (NS II.1.8). That is to say, a *pramāṇa* cannot exist prior to its object; for then the cognition of the object would not be caused by the *prameya* (NS II.1.9). Nor can a *pramāṇa* exist after its object; for without a *pramāṇa* there could be no *prameya*, which by definition is that which is known by a *pramāṇa* (NS II.1.10). Finally, they could not exist simultaneously; for then whenever a *prameya* is given so will a *pramāṇa*, so that, multiple *prameyas* being given at once (for everything that exists is a *prameya*), there would be multiple simultaneous cognitions of them through their *pramāṇas* (NS II.1.11).[22]

Pakṣilasvāmin, commenting on this line of argument in his *Nyāyasūtrabhāṣya*, notes that the Mādhyamika fails to take it into account that something is referred to by a certain term not necessarily because it is actively functioning in a certain way, but because it has the capacity to do so. Something is called a *pramāṇa*, e.g., because it is, has been, or will be the cause of cognition. Thus one can refer to something as a *pramāṇa* even though it exists prior to its *prameya*. Similarly, someone is called a cook if he is able to cook, if he has cooked in the past and will cook again in the future, and not just if he is actively cooking.[23]

In sum, the principle of coexisting counterparts appears to embody a metaphysical mistake. It tells us that things exist only insofar as they are related to their counterparts – things opposite or correlative – moreover, to those counterparts only insofar as they exist concurrently. But ordinary experience tells us that both parts of this view are wrong. A thing is what it is by virtue of its positive, non-relational characteristics. Its being opposite to something else depends first and foremost on what it *is* (and what its opposite is). A thing's being cause of an effect depends on those properties inherent in it that determine that it yields a certain effect in certain conditions. But even if we conceive of a thing

under a certain description as standing essentially in relation to another thing, e.g., as its cause, that does not mean that its counterpart must exist concurrently. For it could stand in relation to a counterpart that is to be located in the past or the future, or indeed, to a counterpart that may never actually occur.

Let us grant, then, for the time being that the principle of coexisting counterparts is a fallacy, though I shall devote the entire last section of this article to the matter. Even considering that MMK I.5 and 7 express fallacious arguments insofar as they appeal to this principle, the basic point of the chapter that there is no coherent account of causation may still be valid. Indeed, there are clearly other arguments against causation in the chapter that do not appeal to this principle.

Certainly, if one thinks about the matter independently one immediately sees that there are serious problems with the *satkāryavāda*, i.e., the notion that the effect already exists in some sense in its cause. This model may fit certain types of transformation, in particular, cases in which there is an obvious continuity from cause to effect, e.g., when milk changes into curds. But it does not fit cases were such continuity is lacking, as when two gases combine to form a liquid. Nor does it fit the situation of one event causing another, as when a spark ignites an explosion or a *karman* gives rise to its *phala*.[24] However, the *asatkāryavāda* has its problems, too. It fits the phenomenon of emergence well, that is, the origination of something possessing properties not possessed by its constituents. It can also account for causal relations between events. But it does not fit cases of transformation, such as when milk turns into curds or a lump of clay is made into a pot. The obvious conclusion to be drawn from this is that it would be a mistake to attempt to account for all types of causation in terms of just the one theory or the other.

Nāgārjuna knew well how to point up the shortcomings of both theories. Thus, again, *kārikā* 8 states,

naivāsato naiva sataḥ pratyayo 'rthasya yujyate /
asataḥ pratyayaḥ kasya, sataś ca pratyayena kim?//

There cannot be a condition of an existent or a non-existent thing. Of what would the condition of a non-existent [thing] be? And for something that exists, why is a condition needed?

The first half of the second line, "Of what would the cause of a non-existent [effect] be?," at first glance seems to be another application of the principle of coexisting counterparts (already employed in *kārikā* 7), as if to say that something can be a cause only if its effect exists simultaneously with it. However, it also suggests another, more forceful argument against the *asatkāryavāda*, namely, that in certain types of

transformation the effect must exist in some sense prior to becoming manifest because an efficient cause must be able to operate on an existing substance. A potter, for example, requires an existing lump of clay out of which to fashion a pot. In such cases, if the effect in no sense existed prior to its origin, it could not be brought about by the functioning of its cause. Such an idea is expressed in *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* 9, which lists the reasons for the *satkārya* doctrine, by the expression, "because there is no making of that which doesn't exist."[25] The *Yuktidīpikā* explicates the idea with the following verse:

asattvān nāsti sambandhaḥ kārakaiḥ sattvasaṅgibhiḥ /
asambandhasya cotpattim icchato na vyavasthitiḥ //

Because [according to the *asatkāryavāda*] [the effect] does not exist, there is no connection [of the effect] with the causal factors [that bring forth the effect from the cause], which are connected [only] with what [already] exists. And for one who considers there to be an arising of that which is without a connection [with causal factors], there is no fixing [of any relation between cause and effect].[26]

In other words, if the effect did not exist already in some form so that the various forces of efficient causation have something to work on, then the fully manifest effect would never emerge. On the other hand, it seems absurd to suggest that the effect already exists. That is the sense of the last statement of MMK I.8: if the effect already exists, why resort to a cause? What would a cause do?[27] So the *satkāryavāda* cannot be true, either. In sum, neither the *asatkārya*- nor the *satkāryavāda* seems valid.

A further argument against the *asatkāryavāda* is brought forward in *kārikā* 14:

athāsad api tat tebhyaḥ pratyayebhyaḥ pravartate /
apratyayebhyo 'pi kasmāt phalaṃ nābhipravartate //

If, though it does not exist [yet], it arises from those conditions, then why doesn't the result arise from things which are not [its proper] conditions?

That is to say, if cause and effect are not ultimately identical, what accounts for their necessary connection? If the effect arises from something different from itself, why from the particular thing that is designated its cause and not any other thing that is different from it? This is a quite cogent argument. Indeed, David Hume asked a similar question about causation.

This argument, also, was probably current in Sāṃkhya circles in Nāgārjuna's day. The third reason in favor of the *satkārya* doctrine that is stated in *Sāṃkhya Kārikā* 9 is *sarvasambhavābhāvāt*, "because

everything does not arise," i.e., because not just anything arises from a certain cause but only a certain type of thing.[28]

Thus in the end the refutation of the two basic alternative theories of causation considered in MMK I does not seem far-fetched at all. In fact, it seems that Nāgārjuna made use of stock objections to those theories that were current in his day. His method in MMK I is simply to agree with those objections without really considering how the theories might be defended against them. Indeed, perhaps the most legitimate complaint to be made against Nāgārjuna in MMK I is that he does not make a conscientious effort to understand the facts that speak in favor of the theories he is criticizing or consider how the latter might be revised in response to the objections raised against them. Rather, with the first hint of a difficulty he wants to jettison an entire theory. In the end, Nāgārjuna in MMK I does not really seem to want to get at the truth.[29] In particular, it can be asked why he does not weigh the possibility of an intermediate position. His critique of the *satkārya*- and *asatkāryavāda* seems driven by the assumption that all types of causation must be explained by either theory. Yet it would seem most reasonable to adopt the position that some causal phenomena are explained by one theory, others by the other – i.e., to assert, not their conjunction, which is the third alternative rejected in *kārikā* I.3, but their disjunction. In fact, Abhidharma philosophers did not put all their eggs in one basket but appealed to a variety of types of causes in explaining phenomena.

Of course, Nāgārjuna does not rest content with a critique of the two basic alternatives discussed above but also criticizes the four types of causes recognized in Abhidharma philosophy, which are stated in *kārikā* 4. This is considered to be an exhaustive list; the *kārikā* itself says, "there is no fifth kind." Having refuted these four types, it would indeed seem that, at least for Buddhists, Nāgārjuna has refuted causation *überhaupt*.

Whether the refutations of these types of cause (*kārikā* 9–12) are final, of course, remains to be seen. At least one of the arguments, that directed against cause in the sense of "object of cognition" (*ālambana*) in *kārikā* 10, may appeal to the questionable principle of coexisting counterparts. The arguments of the other verses, however, are not without substance. Verses nine and twelve, interestingly, appeal to the idea that entities have no definable reality – they neither exist, do not exist, etc. – so that the very idea of one thing bringing another into existence, or being the condition of another's arising, is problematic. I shall consider this idea further in the next section.

However, at this point in my discussion I wish to draw only a rather minimal conclusion: that Nāgārjuna's refutation of causation in MMK I does not completely collapse with the discovery of a fallacy in the fifth verse – which in any case would not be the fallacy Hayes thinks he sees there but rather a fallacy based on the principle of coexisting counterparts – nor in the seventh. Rather, that chapter succeeds in casting considerable doubt on the two main Hindu theories of causation that were current in Nāgārjuna's day, and it may in addition raise serious questions about various Buddhist theories. Overall, the argument of MMK I is complex and considerably more work has to be done to evaluate it properly. In any case, it remains to be seen how it is corrupted by fallacies.

2

Hayes sees fallacies of ambiguity similar to the one he believes to occur in MMK I in MMK XV. In MMK XV the term *svabhāva* again plays a crucial role.

MMK XV.1–3 read as follows:

1. *na sambhavaḥ svabhāvasya yuktaḥ pratyayahetubhiḥ* /
   hetupratyayasambhūtaḥ svabhāvaḥ kṛtako bhavet //
2. *svabhāvaḥ kṛtako nāma bhaviṣyati punaḥ katham*? /
   akṛtrimaḥ svabhāvo hi nirapekṣaḥ puratra ca //
3. *kutaḥ svabhāvasyābhāve parabhāvo bhaviṣyati*? /
   svabhāvaḥ parabhāvasya parabhāvo hi kathyate //

1. The arising of own-being/essence from causal conditions is not possible. An essence that has arisen from causal conditions would be caused (*kṛtaka*).
2. For how could there be an essence which is caused? For an essence is uncaused and not dependent on anything else.
3. How, in the absence of an essence, will there be other-being? For other-being is said to be the essence of that which is other.

Nāgārjuna seems to be arguing here that there cannot be any own-being or essence (*svabhāva*), since an essence is the sort of thing that does not arise or come into existence; an essence, that is, is something eternal. He seems to presuppose that all that we observe undergoes change. The existence of essences is precluded by the fact that everything is always changing. Given that there are no essences, that there is nothing that a thing can be said to be essentially, it follows that there are no contrary essences, that there is nothing that a thing can be said not to be.

At first glance this last argument also seems to turn on the principle of coexisting counterparts. But it may be construed in another way that makes it appear more sound, namely: if things do not have essences,

then they are in no way determinate. Thus something can no more be a determinate non-X than a determinate X. Nāgārjuna then proceeds in the following *kārikās* to argue that, if a thing is not determinate, it cannot exist; for in order for something to be, it must be a determinate *something* (*kārikā* 4). But if nothing exists, then nothing can be said not to exist, either; for the notion of non-existence has significance only in contrast to that of existence (*kārikā* 5). Thus it is wrong to assert of things either that they exist or do not exist. Neither view is in keeping with the Buddha's teaching (*kārikās* 6 and 7). The view that things exist is the heresy of Eternalism. The view that they do not is the heresy of Annihilationism (*kārikā* 10).

Where are the fallacies in MMK XV? Hayes, to begin with, sees a fallacy of equivocation in the transition from *kārikās* 1 and 2 to *kārikā* 3. In 1 and 2, Hayes believes, the term *svabhāva* is used, not in its ontological sense, as I have translated above, but in its causal sense, meaning 'independent thing'. In *kārikā* 3, however, he thinks that it is used in its ontological sense, meaning 'identity'. Thus in 1 and 2 Nāgārjuna is making the rather straightforward, indeed trivial, assertion that that which is causally independent cannot arise in dependence on causal conditions. That which is causally independent is not fabricated. Thus, if we accept that everything exists as a result of the operation of causal factors – as it seems we must – then there is nothing that is truly independent, there is no *svabhāva*. But in *kārikā* 3 he appears to construe *svabhāva* in the sense of 'identity' – or as I prefer, 'essence' or 'own-being' – arguing that if there is no essence of entities, as he seems to have established with *kārikās* 1 and 2, then there is no difference or other-being (*parabhāva*), either. And so Nāgārjuna is on his way to proving that things neither exist nor do not exist. If Nāgārjuna is employing *svabhāva* in different senses in this way, then he is indeed guilty of committing at least one glaring fallacy in MMK XV.

Is there, however, any way in which Nāgārjuna could be employing *svabhāva* univocally in *kārikās* 1 through 3? Specifically, is there any possibility of making sense of the claim that the essence of something cannot be conceived as coming into existence through the operation of causes, so that *svabhāva* could be taken to mean 'essence' or 'own-being' in *kārikās* 1 and 2 as it clearly does in *kārikā* 3? I believe that there is, and that seeing that there is is one of the keys to understanding not only this chapter of the MMK but Nāgārjuna's thought as a whole.

In order to explicate the idea that I believe is behind MMK XV.1–3 I shall have recourse to a parallel in Western philosophy. Although I believe that it can be shown that this idea is anticipated in other texts

of Indian philosophy – indeed, I will proceed to do so in the sequel – it is not as fully developed in that tradition as it is in Western philosophy; in fact, the passage from Nāgārjuna presently under discussion is the fullest treatment of the idea to be found in Indian philosophy, as far as I know. Thus, in order to achieve a broader perspective on the problem I adopt here a comparative methodology.

I take as my parallel the first part of Spinoza's *Ethics*. At the beginning of Part One Spinoza defines substance as "that which is in itself and is conceived through itself."[30] That is, a substance is that which does not depend causally on anything else; for Spinoza also says with Axiom Four that "the knowledge of an effect depends on, and involves, the knowledge of the cause." Anything that is caused by another, in other words, is conceived through that other. To say that substance is conceived through itself, then, is to say that it is not caused by anything else.

Spinoza employs this concept of substance to prove that there can be only one, infinite substance, God. From the definition of substance and the implication that a substance cannot be caused by anything else, which Spinoza takes to mean that it is self-caused (*causa sui*), it follows that "it is of the nature of substance to exist."[31] From the concept of God as a substance of infinite attributes, then, we must conclude that God exists. However, since two substances cannot share the same attributes, for substances are differentiated only by their attributes, God alone can exist; for God has all possible attributes.[32] That is to say, there is no attribute that God does not already have that might constitute the unique essence of some distinct substance.

Spinoza's conception of substance, which was shared by the other rationalist philosophers, clearly goes back, through Medieval philosophy, to the notion of substance in Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. In that work Aristotle sought to determine the primary sense in which things can be said to be. He decided that substance is the primary mode of being and that all other modes of being are somehow derivative of substance. A prominent characteristic of substance for Aristotle is that it is *per se*; it is definable in terms that are unique to itself and it is not able to be produced by something else.[33] On the one hand, this means that an individual substance can arise only from a substance of the same type: man begets a man, not a horse. Thus it would seem that Aristotle did not consider substance to be fully eternal. On the other hand, insofar as he considered substance to be ultimately the substantial form that combines with matter to make an individual concrete substance, and that substantial forms are immaterial, intelligible, and not subject to

change – indeed, that they are eternal objects of contemplation in the mind of God – he believed substance to be eternal.

While it would certainly be far-fetched to suggest that Nāgārjuna conceives of *svabhāva* as an Aristotelian substantial form, it seems not implausible to suggest that he thinks of essence as that which is conceived through itself without reference to anything else. That is what makes an essence an essence; that is how an essence determines a thing's uniqueness. But then an essence cannot be produced by something else; for it would then bear the marks of that production. It would reflect its origin in some way, thereby ceasing to be what makes a thing unique. Essence or own-being, therefore, must be *per se*. The notion of a caused essence is a contradiction in terms (*kārikā* 2).

Nāgārjuna seems to be explicating this very idea with MMK XV.8 and 9.

8. *yady astitvaṃ prakṛtyā syān na bhaved asya nāstitā* /
prakṛter anyathābhāvo na hi jātūpapadyate //
9. *prakṛtau kasya cāsatyām anyathātvaṃ bhaviṣyati*? /
prakṛtau kasya ca satyām anyathātvaṃ bhaviṣyati? //

8. If something existed by nature, it could not not exist; for the changing of the nature [of a thing] never occurs at all.
9. If there is no nature [of a thing] what could become otherwise? And if there is a nature [of a thing] what could become otherwise?

Nāgārjuna appears to be saying in these verses that if a thing were to exist by virtue of having a certain "nature" – he shifts now from the word *svabhāva* to the word *prakṛti*, which appears to mean roughly the same thing – then it would be eternal; for its nature being uncaused by anything else, it would be independent of everything. Therefore, no change in circumstances could possibly affect it, in particular, result in its no longer existing. If things have natures, they cannot ever become different from what they are; for that would constitute a change in nature, which is invulnerable to change. On the other hand, how can things be without any nature at all? In that case, too, we could not talk about something becoming different or changing, because that would imply passing from one determinate state to another.

In sum, if there were natures or essences, there could be no change. Reality would be completely static. (Even Spinoza did not think the attributes of substances could change. Rather, according to Spinoza only the finite modes of the two known attributes of substance, thought and extension, can act on each other.) But in fact we observe change. Therefore, reality cannot be rooted in natures or essences. However, if there are no natures or essences, then one cannot really speak of that

which is. That being the case, one cannot speak of that which is not, either. And so on.[34]

The core of the argument, as I have suggested, is that an essence cannot depend on something else because it is by definition that which is unique to a thing. If it depended on something else it would somehow reflect the fact; it would share some property with its cause and thus lose its uniqueness. I believe that this principle derives from a deeper principle, namely, that what is cannot not be and what is not cannot be. In the Western tradition this thought, of course, was first expressed by Parmenides:

> Only one story, one road, now is left: that it is. And on this there are signs in plenty that, being, it is ungenerated and indestructible, whole, of one kind and unwavering, and complete. Nor was it, nor will it be, since now it is, all together, one, continuous. For what generation will you seek for it? How, whence, did it grow? That it came from what is not I shall not allow you to say or think – for it is not sayable or thinkable that it is not. And what need would have impelled it, later or earlier, to grow – if it began from nothing? Thus it must either altogether be or not.[35]
>
> But come, I will tell you . . . the only roads of enquiry there are to be thought of: one, that it is and cannot not be, is the path of persuasion (for truth accompanies it); another, that it is not and must not be – this I say to you is a trail devoid of all knowledge.[36]
>
> That which is there to be spoken of and thought of must be. For it is possible for it to be, but not possible for nothing to be.[37]

Parmenides was not reluctant to accept the consequence of a theory of "what is" that Nāgārjuna points out: there indeed can be no change. Nāgārjuna could not accept such a consequence without qualification; as a Buddhist he had to adhere, at least on the level of conventional truth, to the doctrine that everything is constantly changing. But Parmenides was not thus constrained and was eager to deduce that the world of change and diversity is completely unreal.

One could say that Aristotle's and Spinoza's theories of substance represent refinements and modifications of Parmenides's original doctrine. Insofar as they define substance as that which is *per se* or *causa sui*, they spell out why being in its primary sense is eternal and not subject to change. Yet insofar as they give accounts of how the substantial form is able to combine with matter, or how the finite modes of the attributes of substance can influence each other, they explain how change is possible after all.

Now, something akin to the Parmenidean doctrine is also to be found in Indian philosophy. It is attested by some of the earliest Sāṃkhya writings, which however, like the writings of Parmenides, exist only in fragments. Thus we have the following passage from Vārṣagaṇya in the *Abhidharmakośa*:

yad asty asty eva tad, yan nāsti nāsty eva tad. asato nāsti sambhavaḥ, sato nāsti vināśaḥ.[38]

That which exists only exists. That which does not exist can only not exist. There is no coming to be of what is not nor destruction of what is.

This statement obviously goes beyond the *satkāryavāda*. It states, not just that something must exist before it becomes manifest, but more generally that being is absolutely eternal and non-being absolutely impossible. Similarly, we find at *Nyāyasūtrabhāṣya* I.1.29 the statement, *nāsata ātmalābhaḥ, na sata ātmahānam,* "There is no coming to be of what is not, nor destruction of what is." And *Bhagavadgītā* II.16ab reads: *nāsato vidyate bhāvo, nābhāvo vidyate sataḥ*, "There is no existence of that which is not nor non-existence of that which is."[39] Wilhelm Halbfass associates these texts with Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI.2.1–2:[40]

In the beginning, my dear, this world was just Being (*sat*), one only, without a second. To be sure, some people say: "In the beginning this world was just Non-being (*asat*), one only, without a second; from that Non-being Being was produced."

But verily, my dear, whence could this be? . . . How from Non-being could Being be produced? On the contrary, my dear, in the beginning this world was just Being, one only, without a second.[41]

And, indeed, the Upaniṣad goes on to deny the reality of a plurality of entities and change, as Parmenides did – if not as emphatically or in as exhaustive detail. However, the implication of a completely static cosmos was not drawn in Sāṃkhya.

It is my contention that just as Aristotle and Spinoza can be seen as unpacking Parmenides's thought in developing their theories of substance, so Nāgārjuna can be seen as unpacking the theory of the eternality of being reflected in Chāndogya Upaniṣad VI and the Sāṃkhya texts cited above, with his account of *svabhāva* as uncaused (*akṛtrima*). I do not presume to prove this here; I merely propose it as a reasonable hypothesis upon which one might base an interpretation of the use of the term *svabhāva* in MMK XV different from that of Hayes.[42]

Thus I suggest that the term *svabhāva* be taken univocally throughout MMK XV in the sense of 'identity', 'own-being', or 'essence' and that Nāgārjuna should be taken to be asserting that there cannot be any essence – hence, ultimately, any being or non-being – because there is change, at least from the standpoint of conventional truth. For an essence cannot change insofar as it is completely uncaused. This certainly provides for a more felicitous reading of *kārikās* 1 and 2. On Hayes's interpretation they are practically tautologies:

1. Birth of an independent thing from causes and conditions is not reasonable. An independent thing born from causes and conditions would be a fabrication.

2. But how could an independent thing be called a fabrication, given that an independent thing is not a fabrication and is independent of anything else?[43]

On my reading, however, Nāgārjuna can be seen to be saying in these verses that essence is independent of causes, thereby appealing implicitly to the notion of essence as *per se* and *causa sui*. (See my translation at the beginning of this section.) Thus there is no shift in the meaning of *svabhāva* from *kārikās* 1 and 2 to *kārikā* 3, as Hayes alleges. With the phrase, "How, in the absence of an essence . . . ?," *kārikā* 3 is simply stating the conclusion to be drawn from *kārikās* 1 and 2, that there is no essence or own-being. It then goes on to state that there can be no other-being, either.

Hayes also sees a fallacy of equivocation in the transition from *kārikā* 3, where he believes the terms *svabhāva* and *parabhāva* are used in the sense of 'identifiable thing' and 'difference', respectively, to *kārikā* 4, where he believes that they are used in the sense of 'causal independence' and 'causal dependence', respectively. The verses read, as Hayes translates them:

3. How, in the absence of an identifiable thing, could there be a difference, given that the identity of a different thing is called a differentia?
4. How can there be existence without either independence or dependence, given that existence is established when there is either independence or dependence?

The fallacy according to Hayes lies in drawing the conclusion that there is no existence (i.e., nothing that exists) without *svabhāva* or *parabhāva qua* causal independence or dependence, from the fact that there is no *svabhāva* or *parabhāva* in the sense of identity or difference – an obvious equivocation. (This meaning shift is the exact opposite of the one Hayes perceives in the transition from *kārikās* 1 and 2 to 3. Thus in Hayes's view Nāgārjuna moves from meaning A to B, then back to A again for each term in the course of four verses!) But I would suggest that Nāgārjuna intends *svabhāva* and *parabhāva* as 'essence'/'own-being' and 'difference'/'other-being' in both verses. The gist of the fourth verse, then, is that something cannot exist unless it is determinate as *essentially X* or *different from X*.

Therefore, Nāgārjuna does not commit any fallacy of equivocation based on the use of *svabhāva* and *parabhāva* in MMK XV. Rather, each of these terms is used univocally throughout.

Perhaps other fallacies could be found in MMK XV if one searched hard enough. But it seems more to the point to note at this stage, as I did in relation to MMK I, that the argument of MMK XV seems sound overall. There are indeed serious problems with the notion of being taken in its strictest sense, as it is at least by Parmenides. As already

noted, if one is committed to such an idea then the realm of change and diversity cannot be accounted for. Not only can there be no coming into and passing out of existence, but there cannot be a plurality of entities, since that would of necessity depend on one thing *not being* another, which is a kind of non-being.[44] If we take being in the strictest sense, then reality would have to be completely static and homogeneous.

Nāgārjuna appears to be developing just this thought in MMK XXIV. There he considers the objections of an opponent (*kārikās* 1–6).[45] If you say that everything here is "empty," i.e., neither has own-being nor other-being, then there are no Four Noble Truths. As we saw, one cannot speak of things being caused to arise, in which case one cannot speak of thirst as the cause of suffering and the removal of thirst as the cause of the end of suffering. Without the Four Noble Truths, there can be no insight into them, no getting rid of undesirable states of mind, no practice nor realization. Without those things, there are none of the stages on the path, no "entering the stream" or "having only more more birth," etc.; and if there are no stages, then there are no people who have attained those stages, no one "who has entered the stream" or "who is to be born only one more time," etc. In short, there is no path nor anyone who follows the path, and so there is no *saṅgha*. And in the absence of the Four Noble Truths, there is no *dharma*; and if there is no *saṅgha* and no *dharma*, how could there be a Buddha? Thus, with the doctrine of the emptiness of everything one undermines all the teachings essential to Buddhism.

Nāgārjuna's response is to turn the tables on the opponent. You say that there are no Four Noble Truths, etc., if everything is empty. But I, Nāgārjuna, say that you can have none of those things if you accept that things exist essentially. "If you see the existence of entities to proceed from their essence, then you see entities to be without causes or causal conditions" (*kārikā* 16). And that will invalidate the Four Noble Truths, for one can no longer speak of the arising of suffering dependent on certain conditions. More directly, if you take suffering to exist essentially, then it must be eternal and there can be no cessation of it (*kārikā* 23). And if suffering is eternal, then it cannot be removed by practising the Noble Eightfold Path (*kārikā* 25). If a person is whatever he is essentially, then, being unenlightened, he cannot become enlightened (*kārikā* 26). If a stage on the path is "yet to be attained" essentially, it can never be attained. And so forth. In sum, if you believe in essence and that things exist through their essences, then there is no *dharma*, no *saṅgha*, and no Buddha – because, fundamentally, there would be no change; everything would be, so to speak, cemented in. Throughout this

text Nāgārjuna emphasizes that it is the notion of *svabhāva* that leads to this consequence. The idea of essence in its strictest sense renders not just all things the Buddhists say false, but also all the beliefs about action and agency that pertain to everyday practice (*kārikās* 36 and 37).

Thus the strict notion of being, as that which is grounded in essence, is highly questionable. It precludes change. Changing things, it seems, can present themselves to us only insofar as they are without essence, i.e., neither completely real nor completely unreal. Thus Nāgārjuna equates emptiness with dependent origination in MMK XXIV.18: "Dependent origination, that is what we call emptiness." The absence of essence entails the emergence of things only in relation to other things, and vice versa. That, however, does not mean that there is any *real* arising of entities, either; for only *real things* can arise. In sum, it would seem that Nāgārjuna's final position, if you will, is indeed that empirical reality is an illusion. In that respect he ultimately agrees with Parmenides. But that does not mean that talk about the Four Noble Truths, etc., is completely mistaken. Statements pertaining to the cause and elimination of suffering, Nāgārjuna tells us, have provisional validity up to the moment of enlightenment. Yet, while they are ultimately false,[46] nevertheless they are closer to the truth than any statements suggesting that things have essences.

In conclusion, it is my belief that the argument of MMK XV is plausible and that if it is to be criticized, it should be challenged not on grounds that it is fallacious, but on grounds that like the first chapter it is one-sided and incomplete. Nāgārjuna does not consider any reasonable alternative positions in regard to being. One may well hold that that which truly is, is eternal, but also believe that change is nevertheless possible. Things might arise insofar as eternal being – say, *qua* substantial forms – is brought into combination with matter. Such, more or less, was Aristotle's doctrine. Or there could be a plurality of entities – atoms – each in itself eternal, whose interrelationships are constantly shifting. Such is the teaching of Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika. Finally, one may simply reject the premise that true being cannot not be and hold instead that, while it must remain identical in essence, it may still undergo accidental modification. Such is the thrust of Jaina philosophy, or in the West, of Spinoza's. It is his refusal to consider these sorts of alternatives, similar to his refusal or inability to consider alternatives or modifications of the *satkārya*- and *asatkāryavādas* in MMK I, that renders Nāgārjuna's discussion in MMK XV ultimately unsatisfactory.

3

I wish now to return to what I have termed the principle of coexisting counterparts. Is this principle really a fallacy?

Let us first review some of the ways the principle is applied in the MMK. I have already noted some of its applications to the concepts of causation, time, and the means of knowledge (*pramāṇa*). In MMK III Nāgārjuna critiques specifically the *pramāṇa* of perception, focusing on the faculty of vision. For vision there must be a seer, an object seen, and the act of seeing itself (*darśana*). In *kārikā* 6ab he makes the claim that "there is no seer who does not exceed (*atiraskṛtya*), nor [a seer] who exceeds (*tiraskṛtya*), the seeing." That is to say, the seer can be neither dependent on nor independent of the seeing. If the seer existed independently of the seeing, that is, if he did not see, then he would not really be a *seer*. On the other hand, the seer cannot be altogether dependent on the seeing, either; for a relation of dependence presupposes separate terms. To be a seer one must in some way be able to execute an independent act of seeing and not be completely bound up with seeing.

The first part of this argument would seem to involve some application of the principle of coexisting counterparts. A thing cannot be a seer unless it is already accompanied by its correlative, the act of seeing. Having established that there can be no seer in this way Nāgārjuna proceeds in *kārikā* 6cd to deny that there could be a seeing or an object of seeing, either. For seeing, the object of seeing, and the seer are counterparts (correlatives), and if one is eliminated so are the other two. This seems yet another appeal to the principle in question.

In MMK VI Nāgārjuna analyzes the concept of desire (*rāga*), which is of central importance to Buddhist philosophy. In *kārikās* 1 and 2 his argument is much the same as above. If the desirer (*rakta*) existed prior to the desire, then desire could be said to arise in dependence on a desirer. But, it is implied, this is impossible: how can there be a *desirer*, i.e., one who desires, without any desire?[47] On the other hand, it does not make sense to say that desire can arise *without* a desirer, for it must inhere in something. Thus desire cannot occur either with or without a desirer, and so is impossible. Again, the notion that something has no reality independently of its correlative – specifically here and in the previous example, independently of the activity it typically executes – plays a central role.

A final example: In MMK VII Nāgārjuna critiques the concept of action, specifically, the relation between cause of action (*kāraka*) and action itself (*karman*). In the first verse he lays out what he takes

to be exhaustive alternatives. An existent (*sadbhūta*) *kāraka* cannot bring about an existent *karman*, nor can a non-existent *kāraka* bring about a non-existent *karman*. An existent *kāraka*, he continues in the second verse, will not have an action that it carries out; thus in turn any action will be without an agent and any agent will be without an action. Candrakīrti explains this idea as follows.[48] A real or existent (*sadbhūta*) *kāraka* is one that is already possessed of an action insofar as it is a *kāraka*. But in that case it will not need to bring about a further action, hence it will not effect the *karman* in question and the *karman* will be without a *kāraka*. The appeal to the notion of coexisting counterparts is once again obvious and is quite similar to the two previous examples. Nāgārjuna then in *kārikā* 3 quickly dispenses with the other half of the dilemma. If a non-existent (*asadbhūta*) *kāraka* – i.e., one devoid of action – produced a non-existent *karman*, then the *kāraka* would "be without a cause," i.e., without any basis for being called a *kāraka*, and the *karman*, in the absence of a real *kāraka*, would be without a cause as well.[49]

We see in all these examples that the upshot of the principle of coexisting counterparts is that the things that fall within its range stand in relations of mutual dependence. To say that the desire must exist simultaneously with the desirer is to say that neither desire nor desirer can stand by itself; both must come into being together. The impossibility of the desirer without desire seems dictated by the principle of coexisting counterparts proper, while the impossibility of desire without a desirer seems required by the much less questionable, indeed valid, notion that you cannot have a property or action without a substratum. The situation is the same for the pairs of seer/seeing and cause of action/action. The cases discussed in Section One of this paper are a bit different, however. A cause presupposes its effect by the principle of coexisting counterparts, but the effect presupposes its cause by the principle of causation itself, viz., you can't have a certain effect without its cause. For the pair means of knowledge/object of knowledge, however, both concepts seem to presuppose each other by virtue of the principle of coexisting counterparts, and each of the concepts past, present, and future seems to presuppose the other two by this principle.

Nāgārjuna, then, in all of these cases attempts to show that insofar as a thing and its counterpart are mutually dependent, they are unreal. In being dependent on its counterpart and its counterpart being dependent on it, a thing presupposes itself. Or else, in presupposing its counterpart a thing presupposes that which it is supposed to function independently to bring about. Or else, in not existing independently of its counterpart

a thing ceases to be fully distinct from it.[50] These are all absurd consequences.

As pointed out in the first section of this paper, the principle of coexisting counterparts clearly seems erroneous, at least from the standpoint of common sense. In common experience a thing exists just by virtue of what it is, not by virtue of what it is related to. The nature of a thing in most cases is prior both logically and temporally to the things to which it gives rise, to the actions it carries out, to the things it is not, etc. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen if the principle of coexisting counterparts is a fallacy that Nāgārjuna himself commits. That is to say, is it, in the arguments in which he employs it, a premise of his own or a belief of those he is critiquing?

The Prāsaṅgika interpretation of Nāgārjuna, which most scholars seem to prefer, would support the latter alternative. Nowhere does Nāgārjuna present a thesis of his own, presumably not even as a premise in an argument; rather, he is always merely showing how others' views lead to absurdity.[51] In that case, even if the principle of coexisting counterparts were a fallacy, it would not be a fallacy that Nāgārjuna himself is guilty of. However, is it at all plausible that Nāgārjuna's opponents adhered to anything like the principle in question?

Recent work by Kamaleswar Bhattacharya suggests how Nāgārjuna might have thought so. Bhattacharya has shown how certain grammatical notions underly many of Nāgārjuna's arguments.[52] The main grammatical notion to which Nāgārjuna seems to appeal is that a *kāraka*, a grammatical function such as subject, object, instrument, etc., is conceived in relation to the action (*kriyā*) expressed by the verb. Thus the subject of a sentence is that which independently carries out an action,[53] the object that which undergoes it (or, according to Pāṇini's definition, "that which is most desired to be accomplished [by the action] of the agent"),[54] and so forth. Taking this grammatical principle quite literally, Nāgārjuna is able to insist that something is not the agent of a certain action unless it is actively engaged in it. However, the very notion of a subject as that which independently, i.e., only occasionally and of itself, carries out an action is thereby violated. Hence, the very definitions of the grammatical cases lead to paradox when they are taken together. All of the arguments considered above exhibit this paradox in specific ways. Bhattacharya specifically discusses the argument of MMK VII as an application of the above grammatical principle.[55]

Thus the principle of coexisting counterparts seems in many cases reducible to a certain grammatical notion current in the thought of Nāgārjuna's day, but interpreted very literally by him. And so he

cannot be accused of committing the fallacy of coexisting counterparts himself, since he could say that he employs it in his *reductio ad absurdum* arguments only insofar as it is a belief held by those he is criticizing. In that case, the most appropriate objection to Nāgārjuna's employment of this principle would be, once again, not that in doing so he is guilty of a fallacy, but that he is taking an idea more rigidly than those who hold it would ever accept. This is, essentially, what is known in Nyāya dialectic as *chala*, the dialectical trick of construing an opponent's view differently from the way it is intended.

Nevertheless, this solution is not entirely satisfactory because it does not account for all applications of the principle of coexisting counterparts. The opposition between *svabhāva* and *parabhāva* is perhaps the most obvious example. Nāgārjuna says that there can be no other-being without own-being. Similarly, he says that there can be no non-being (*abhāva*) without being (*bhāva*). Again, he says that there can be no cause without a (coexisting) effect. None of these cases involves any reference to action, as the grammatical examples do.

There is another way, however, in which Nāgārjuna can be seen as employing the principle of coexisting counterparts only provisionally for the sake of argument, and that is that he understood it as an expression of the doctrine of dependent origination, which all Buddhists, who are the main target of his criticism, believe.

There is some evidence in support of this hypothesis in the MMK itself. Nāgārjuna suggests in the opening two verses of the MMK (MMK I.1–2) that dependent origination is the gist of the Buddha's teaching. Presumably that is what he intends to expound in his own treatise. While he does explain, in rather conventional fashion, the classical twelve-fold chain of dependent origination in the twenty-fifth chapter of the MMK, the latter is not what he is occupied with throughout the work. Rather, we meet again and again with applications of the principle of coexisting counterparts. And, clearly, the coexistence of counterparts is a kind of dependent arising of entities: X cannot occur without its counterpart and vice versa. Moreover, it is clear from the MMK that Nāgārjuna understood dependent origination in an unusual way. Dependent origination entails for him the non-existence of that which arises, hence, ultimately, the unreality of dependent origination itself. Thus in the opening couplet he speaks of a dependent origination that is "without cessation, without origin, without destruction, not eternal, not distinct, not separate, without coming, without going, without conceptual construction." Perhaps he thinks of dependent origination in this way

because he thinks of it as the *mutual* dependence of entities, which as we saw above tends to imply their illusoriness.

There are various passages in some of the works attributed to Nāgārjuna by Christian Lindtner that suggest a reconceiving of dependent origination as mutual dependence. Thus *Lokātītastava* 8–9:

8. That an agent is self-dependent (*svatantraḥ*) and [his] action also is, You [the Buddha] have [only] expressed conventionally. Actually, You are convinced that both are established in mutual dependence (*parasparāpekṣikī. . . siddhiḥ*).
9. [In the ultimate sense] no agent exists and no experiencer exists. Merit and demerit are dependently born (*pratītyajam*). You have declared, O Master of words, that that which is dependently born is unborn![56]

The notion of mutual dependence and dependent origination seem to run together in this passage. Consider as well *Lokātītastava* 10:

[An object of knowledge is] no object of knowledge unless it is being known. But [this is impossible since] consciousness does not exist [previously] without it! Therefore You have said that knowledge and the object of knowledge do not exist by own-being.[57]

The relation of mutual dependence between consciousness and object of knowledge implies that each lacks own being. But at MMK XXIV.18 Nāgārjuna clearly implies that things lack own-being insofar as they arise dependently. Nāgārjuna seems to be thinking of mutual dependence and dependent origination in the same way.

Consider also *Śūnyatāsaptati* 13–14:

13. A father is not a son, a son is not a father. Neither exists without being correlative (*anyonya*). Nor are they simultaneous. The twelve members likewise.
14. Just as pleasure and pain depending on an object in a dream do not have [a real] object, thus neither that which arises dependently nor that which it arises dependently from exists.[58]

Verse 13 suggests that the twelve members of the chain of dependent origination are mutually dependent on each other like father and son. Assuming verse 14 to be a continuation of the thought of 13, Nāgārjuna refers in 14 both to the relation of mutual dependence between father and son and the twelve-fold chain as dependent origination.

Finally, at *Śūnyatāsaptati* 27–28 Nāgārjuna practically sums up his entire philosophy as follows:

27. The marked (*lakṣya*) is established from a mark (*lakṣaṇa*) different from the marked. It is not established by itself. Nor are the [two] established by each other [since] the unestablished cannot establish unestablished.
28. In this [manner] cause (*hetu*), effect (*phala*), feeling (*vedanā*), feeler (*vedaka*), etc., seer (*draṣṭṛ*), visible, etc. (*draṣṭavyādi*), whatever it may be, are all explained without exception.[59]

Everything, he says here, can be seen as non-existent by virtue of – not, specifically, dependent origination, according to which merely the arising of one thing is conditioned by the presence of another – but the principle of coexisting counterparts, i.e., *mutual* dependence. Yet Nāgārjuna has stated that the Buddha's teaching boils down to the doctrine of dependent origination. Thus again it would seem that by dependent origination Nāgārjuna understands ultimately mutual dependence or the coexisting of counterparts.

Thus, in employing the principle of coexisting counterparts in his arguments Nāgārjuna could claim simply to be going along with an assumption that any Buddhist would make, i.e., that things arise dependently. Hence in this way, too, the principle of coexisting counterparts would not be a fallacy that he himself commits. It is not a premise of his own but one that is ultimately to be attributed to the theorists he is attacking.

What, however, might have inspired Nāgārjuna to reconstrue dependent origination as mutual dependence? Perhaps it was a more profound experience of his own of the truth of dependent origination. This leads us to consider yet a third, and to me the most interesting, way in which the principle of coexisting counterparts might not in fact be a fallacy.

The coincidence of opposites or the interconnectedness or interpenetration of all entities is a teaching that is found in a variety of mystical traditions, East and West. Consider, for example, the following passage from the *Chuang Tzu*:

> Everything has its "that," everything has its "this." From the point of view of "that" you cannot see it, but through understanding you can know it. So I say, "that" comes out of "this" and "this" depends on "that" – which is to say that "this" and "that" give birth to each other. But where there is birth there must be death; where there is death there must be birth. Where there is acceptability there must be unacceptability; where there is unacceptability there must be acceptability. Where there is recognition of right there must be recognition of wrong; where there is recognition of wrong there must be recognition of right. Therefore the sage does not proceed in such a way, but illuminates all in the light of Heaven. [Here Nāgārjuna might say, the sage understands everything through a non-conceptual knowing, a *nirvikalpakajñāna*.] He too recognizes a "this," but a "this" which is also a "that," a "that" which is also "this." His "that" has both a right and a wrong in it; his "this" too has both a right and a wrong in it. So, in fact, does he still have a "this" and "that"? [I.e., are these things real?] A state in which "this" and "that" no longer find their opposites is called the hinge of the Way.[60]

This passage, which may be compared, e.g., with the second chapter of the *Lao Tzu*, expresses a necessary interdependence of opposites that is reminiscent of the principle of coexisting counterparts. A similar teaching of the interconnectedness of all entities, now explicitly linked to the doctrine of Emptiness, is also to be found in Avataṃsaka and

Hua Yen literature. In the West, the doctrine can be seen reflected in some of the fragments of Heraclitus and in the *Monadology* of Leibniz. Obviously, it would take us too far afield to try to document the idea in all these sources, and it would be impossible to show conclusively that it is precisely the same idea that is expressed in all of them. I can only assert somewhat baldly here, with the hope that the reader shares the impression, that the notion – or different versions of the notion – that everything in the cosmos is intimately tied together, so that the existence of one implies the existence of all, even of that to which it is essentially opposed, occurs in a range of texts.

I propose that the MMK be seen as an attempt to articulate this vision, which for Nāgārjuna is ultimately based not on discursive reasoning but on some kind of non-discursive insight.[61] In that case, the MMK should be seen as a transformative text which does not attempt to demonstrate the truth of interconnectedness, but rather to illustrate its implications in complete detail – the main implication for him being that the world of appearances is unreal – and thereby ultimately evoke the intuitive insight upon which it is based in the reader.[62] The principle of coexisting counterparts, then, which contains the idea of the interconnectedness of entities in seed form, is not employed by Nāgārjuna as a *premise* – of his own or anyone else's – in his arguments. Rather, it represents his final position; it is the realization with which his philosophy begins and ends. As such, it cannot be criticized from the standpoint of common sense, and so cannot be declared a "fallacy;" for that would beg the very question at issue in Nāgārjuna's thought.

Thus I suggest that Nāgārjuna might only pretend in the MMK to demonstrate in rigorous philosophical fashion the illusory nature of the world. In reality his arguments serve only to describe the interconnectedness, hence illusoriness, of all phenomena, not establish it as true. They function to convey knowledge simply by displaying the perspective of highest truth in the fullest possible terms. The reader is not compelled to adopt that perspective by rigorous logic, but is invited to do so by making a paradigm shift, if you will – a leap beyond ordinary experience. Viewed in this way, the principle of coexisting counterparts can once again hardly be dismissed as a fallacy, a mere mistake of reasoning, because it expresses Nāgārjuna's main metaphysical insight. While it may be false, it cannot be trivially so. It hardly seems satisfactory to dismiss it on grounds of common sense, since the gist of the principle is to call common sense into question.

Perhaps, indeed, the safest hypothesis of all is to attribute Nāgārjuna's use of the principle of coexisting counterparts to a lack of sophistication

of logic in his day. Logic developed much more slowly in India than in the West. There was no Aristotle at the beginning of Indian logic who discerned the nature of the syllogism so as to require only minor revisions over the next millenia. Proper argument forms were for a long time poorly understood. Reasoning was, for the most part, merely by analogy. That a relationship of invariable concomitance must exist between middle and major terms of a syllogism became clear, it seems, only with Vasubandhu. Before that, formal fallacies could not be properly analyzed. Many kinds of arguments that are not considered valid today occur in early texts. Some scholars believe that Nāgārjuna himself made the mistake of affirming the consequent in several passages.[63]

Moreover, it is often difficult to detect that an argument really is a fallacy, to say exactly what is wrong with it. Throughout the history of philosophy philosophers have used arguments that were conclusively shown to be fallacies only centuries later. It is possible, then, that just as Zeno employed fallacious arguments to deny motion and plurality, the mistakes in which were not fully understood until much later, so Nāgārjuna could have employed fallacies, based e.g. on the principle of coexisting counterparts, that were not fully apparent to him and the adherents of his school – but are to us. It is certainly not beyond the pale to suggest that Nāgārjuna committed fallacies in the MMK, or even that fallacies are at the heart of the argument of the text; that would not require us to deny that he was a great philosopher.

Nevertheless, it is really doubtful that Nāgārjuna would have been unaware that the principle of coexisting counterparts is a blatant contradiction of common sense. It also seems implausible that he would not have realized – any less than Zeno – that his reasoning would appear simply fallacious to most people, especially given the objections of the Nyāya philosophers. If he adhered to the principle of coexisting counterparts himself, *then it must have been because he ultimately thought that the perspective of common sense must be overthrown*. In that case, however, his philosophy can hardly be criticized from that standpoint.

Thus, I continue to maintain that it remains to be shown exactly how Nāgārjuna's thought is vitiated by fallacies.

NOTES

[1] "Nāgārjuna's appeal," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* **22** (1994): 299–378.

[2] See *Abhidharmakośa* II.61cd–62.

[3] Candrakīrti refers several times to the holders of the first of the four positions as Sāṃkhyas. See his *Prasannapadā* in *Madhyamakaśāstra*, ed. P.L. Vaidya (Darbhanga:

Mithila Institute, 1960), pp. 6, 6–7; 7, 5–6; 7, 9, etc. Bhāvaviveka also mentions specifically Sāṃkhyas in connection with this position.

[4] Bhāvaviveka identifies the Vaiśeṣikas as defenders of the second position along with certain “Ābhidharmikas.” See William L. Ames, “Bhāvaviveka’s *Prajñāpradīpa*,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* **21** (1993): 224–225. Candrakīrti makes no such identification. It is not implausible that Nāgārjuna would have a Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika theory in mind here, since he extensively attacks Nyāya doctrines in his *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa* and *Vigrahavyāvartanī*.

[5] Bhāvaviveka, however, identifies – somewhat implausibly – certain Sāṃkhya and Jaina philosophers as defenders of the third position. See Ames, p. 226.

[6] For that matter, MMK I.3 is quite similar to NS IV.1.48: *nāsan na san na sadasat, sadasator vaidharmyāt*, “[The result of action] is neither existent, non-existent, nor both existent and non-existent, [not the latter in particular] because of the difference of the existent and the non-existent.” Only the first three of the four alternatives mentioned in MMK I.3 are mentioned in this *sūtra*, but the resemblance is close enough to raise the question whether Nāgārjuna in MMK I is continuing a debate that was carried on between Nyāya-Vaiśeṣika and earlier, i.e., pre-Nāgārjunan, Mādhyamikas.

Johannes Bronkhorst, however, has argued that various apparent references to Madhyamaka doctrines in the fourth *adhyāya* of the Nyāya Sūtra – specifically, NS IV.1.14, which expresses the view that “entities arise from non-being” (*abhāvād bhāvotpattiḥ. . .*); NS IV.1.36, which asserts that the own-being of things is not established because they are dependent on other things (*na svabhāvasiddhir apekṣikatvāt*); and NS IV.2.32–33, which suggest that *pramāṇa* and *prameya* are illusory, comparable to a dream or a “city of Gandharvas” – all of these apparent references to Madhyamaka may not have been part of the Nyāya Sūtra that Nāgārjuna knew but later interpolations (“Nāgārjuna and the Naiyāyikas,” *Journal of Indian Philosophy* **13** [1985]: 107–132). For one thing, *sūtras* IV.1.11–43 do not fit well in the sequence of topics of the *śāstra*. Bronkhorst believes that all of the *sūtras* in this section may originally have been *vārttikas* in Pakṣilasvāmin’s commentary on the Nyāya Sūtra that were later misconstrued as *sūtras*.

However, there are apparent references to Madhyamaka doctrines at the beginning of the second *adhyāya* that cannot easily be dismissed as later interpolations, since they fit well in their context. II.1.8–11 state that perception, etc., are not *pramāṇas* because they are “not established in any of the three times” (*traikalyāsiddheḥ*), i.e., a *pramāṇa* can be neither prior to, subsequent to, nor simultaneous with its *prameya*; II.1.17–18 make the point that the *pramāṇas* themselves cannot be proven by other *pramāṇas*. The first idea seems to be the same as that presented at *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa* 12; the second seems to allude to the topic discussed at length at *Vigrahavyāvartanī* 31 ff. Bronkhorst, however, wants to hold that these are really references to Sarvāstivāda doctrines.

Without going into Bronkhorst’s reasoning in detail I shall merely point out that much depends on his rather dubious interpretation of NS II.1.11, *yugapatsiddhau pratyarthaniyatatvāt kramavṛttitvābhāvo buddhīnām*: “If [*pramāṇa* and *prameya*] were established simultaneously, then since [*pramāṇas*] are fixed in regard to their object, there would be no sequential occurrence of cognitions.” Bronkhorst writes that “it is hard to see why a Mādhyamika should say that mental acts would not occur in sequence in case objects and means of knowledge were to exist simultaneously” (p. 108). Thus he suggests that this *sūtra* refers to Sarvāstivāda philosophy, which does emphasize the point that two cognitions cannot occur at the same time. Thus, if *pramāṇa* and *prameya* were *both* taken as *cognitions*, as in the case of the cognizing of a mental or emotional state – desire, attachment, etc. – then their simultaneous occurrence would immediately violate the principle that cognitions must occur one

after the other. But the *sūtra* admits of a more straightforward solution. The principle that mental acts cannot occur simultaneously would be overthrown by the assumption that *pramāṇa* and *prameya* (the latter conceived no longer necessarily as a mental state) exist together just because numerous *pramāṇas* – e.g., the various sense organs – and their corresponding objects – color, taste, etc. – would all exist at the same time.

In light of the fact, then, that the Nyāya Sūtra itself does seem to refer to Madhyamaka arguments in the second *adhyāya*, it is not implausible to hold that the mentioned passages of the fourth *adhyāya*, including IV.1.48, also refer to Madhyamaka. The upshot of these observations is that Nāgārjuna was not the first Mādhyamika. Rather, earlier versions of Madhyamaka arguments are cited in the Nyāya Sūtra. Nāgārjuna in turn modifies and defends them against Nyāya objections in his *Vigrahavyāvartanī* and *Vaidalyaprakaraṇa*.

[7] Nāgārjuna may also have had a canonical passage, Saṃyutta Nikāya II.18–21, in mind when he framed the tetralemma of MMK I.3. There the Buddha is asked by Kassapa whether the suffering one suffers is caused by oneself, by someone else, both by oneself and by someone else, or neither by oneself nor by someone else. The Buddha denies each of the four alternatives, referring Kassapa instead to the twelve-fold chain of dependent origination as the explanation of the arising of suffering.

[8] T.R.V. Murti also views MMK I in this way. See *The Central Philosophy of Buddhism* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1955), pp. 168–178.

[9] See also *kās* 9 and 14.

[10] It is interesting to compare here the *Āgamaśāstra* commentary on the Māṇḍūkya Upaniṣad, which is attributed to Gauḍapāda. The fourth part contains a reworking of the Madhyamaka critique of causation from an Advaita perspective. The absence of any change, the text argues, indicates changeless consciousness as the ultimate reality! ĀŚ IV.22 is parallel to MMK I.3: *svato vā parato vāpi na kiṃcid vastu jāyate / sad asat sadasad vāpi na kiṃcid vastu jāyate* //. Verses 3–5 of that treatise lay out the dialectical strategy of the work:

bhūtasya jātim icchanti vādinaḥ kecid eva hi /
abhūtasyāpare dhīrā vivadantaḥ parasparam //
bhūtaṃ na jāyate kiṃcid abhūtaṃ naiva jāyate /
vivadanto 'dvayā hy evam ajātiṃ khyāpayanti //
khyāpyamānām ajātiṃ tair anumodāmahe vayam /
vivadāmo na taiḥ sārdham avivādaṃ nibodhata //

"Disputing among themselves, some theorists believe in the origin of that which already exists (*bhūta*), while other wise men [believe in the origin] of that which does not already exist. Nothing that already exists arises; nor does that which does not exist ever arise. Disputing thus, [these philosophers], who are really non-dualists, establish the absence of arising (*ajāti*). We [for our part] approve the non-arising that is established by them. We do not dispute with them. Know that [for us] there is no dispute." One is reminded of course of Nāgārjuna's claim in the *Virgrahavyāvartanī* that he has no position.

[11] Hayes, pp. 312–313.

[12] Cf. David Kalupahana, *Nāgārjuna: The Philosophy of the Middle Way* (Albany, New York: State University of New York Press, 1986), p. 107; Jay Garfield, *The Fundamental Wisdom of the Middle Way* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. 3; Frederick Streng, *Emptiness: A Study in Religious Meaning* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1967), p. 183.

[13] Cf. *Prasannapadā*, p. 26, 14–15:*yadi hi hetvādiṣu parabhūteṣu pratyayeṣu samasteṣu vyasteṣu vyastasamasteṣu hetupratyayasāmagryā anyatra vā kvacid*

bhāvānāṃ kāryāṇām utpādāt pūrvaṃ sattvaṃ syāt, syāt tebhyaḥ utpādaḥ.

[14] See *Yuktidīpikā*, ed. Ram Chandra Pandeya (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 1967), pp. 48–49, for a rehearsal of the standard objections against the *satkāryavāda*, including the objection that the effect cannot exist in the cause before its origination "because it is not perceived" (*agrahaṇāt*), p. 48, 17 ff.

[15] This would appear to be a simple application of Leibniz's Law: identical things must have identical properties.

[16] I take it that *kārikā* 7 is what Hayes refers to as "Nāgārjuna's second critique of the notion of causal relations" and presents in schematic form on pp. 314–315.

[17] David Seyfort Ruegg calls it "the principle of the complementarity of binary concepts and terms" in his article "The Uses of the Four Positions of the *Catuṣkoṭi* and the Problem of the Description of Reality in Mahāyāna Buddhism" (*Journal of Indian Philosophy* **5** [1977]: 1–71); Jacques May refers to it as "le principe de solidarité des contraires," *Prasannapadā Madhyamakavṛtti* (Paris: Adrien-Maisonneuve, 1959). 'Counterpart' translates the Sanskrit terms *pratipakṣa* and *pratidvandvin*. In the *Prasannapadā* the principle is stated in general terms as follows: *yasya ca pratipakṣo 'sti, tad asti, ālokāndhakāravat pārāvaravat saṃśayaniścayavac ca*, p. 37, 24–25.

[18] "Śaṅkara, Nāgārjuna, and Fa Tsang, with Some Western Analogues," in *Interpreting Across Boundaries*, ed. Gerald J. Larson and Eliot Deutsch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 105.

[19] "On Some Non-Formal Aspects of the Proofs of the Madhyamakakārikās," in *Earliest Buddhism and Madhyamaka*, ed. David Seyfort Ruegg and Lambert Schmithausen (Leiden: Brill, 1990), pp. 91–109.

[20] Hayes, p. 315.

[21] I shall not attempt a precise definition of 'counterpart' here. In general, I understand a counterpart to be something in contrast to which a thing is typically conceived. Both opposites and correlatives serve as counterparts in Nāgārjuna's text: being and non-being, self and other, own-being and other-being, etc., are opposites; cause and effect, past, present, and future, desire and desirer, etc., are correlatives. Thus a thing will not have a unique counterpart but will usually have several; obviously, something can have many correlatives. But the principle of coexisting counterparts as I construe it implies that a thing cannot exist without the simultaneous existence of any of its counterparts. Thus in order to question the coherence of a particular concept Nāgārjuna need only show that a thing falling under the concept necessarily stands in a relation of mutual dependence with any one of its various counterparts.

I stress that "the principle of coexisting counterparts" is not something Nāgārjuna himself explicitly formulated, though Candrakīrti did (see note 17). He does come rather close to an explicit formulation, however, in MMK XIV.5–7. Thus XIV.6: *yady anyad anyad anyasmād anyasmād apy ṛte bhavet / tad anyad anyad anyasmād ṛte nāsti ca nāsty ataḥ* //; "If an other could exist without its other, then it would be an other indeed. But an other does not exist without an other, therefore it is not [an other]." See also *Acintyastava* 11–16.

[22] See note 6.

[23] NSBh ad NS II.1.11, *Nyāyadarśanam*, ed. Taranatha Nyāya-Tarkatirtha (Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal, 1985), pp. 422, 10–424, 7. See Bronkhorst, pp. 115–117.

[24] Nevertheless, the *satkāryavāda* is somewhat reminiscent of Laplace's conception that all states of a system are contained in its initial conditions. Thus an omniscient being who knew the position of every particle in the universe together with all the forces acting on it would be able to predict all subsequent events. See *A Philosophical Essay on Probabilities*, trans. Frederick W. Truscott and Frederick L. Emory (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1917), p. 4.

[25] *asadakaraṇāt*.

[26] *Yuktidīpikā*, p. 52. This argument also seems to be implied by MMK I.13cd: *pratyayebhyaḥ kathaṃ tac ca bhaven na pratyayeṣu*?

[27] See *Yuktidīpikā*, p. 48, 32 ff., which begins, [*pūrvapakṣa*:] *itaś cāsatkāryam, kartṛprayāsasāphalyāt*; that is, the *asatkāryavāda* must be true, "because the effort of the agent has a purpose."

[28] Note also the second half of the verse cited from the *Yuktidīpikā* above.

[29] It may well have been in response to the Madhyamaka way of arguing that the Nyāya school emphasized the distinction between *saṃvāda*, debate carried out in a spirit of cooperation for the sake of discovering truth, from *jalpa* and *vitaṇḍā*. See NS I.2.1–3, IV.2.47–49. These categories were already recognized in the *Carakasaṃhitā*, but the Nyāya Sūtra offers an expanded treatment of them. The Nyāya Sūtra also treats *chala*, the deliberate misconstrual of an opponent's intention, more extensively than it is treated in the *Carakasaṃhitā*. Many of Nāgārjuna's dialectical moves can be seen, I believe, as varieties of *chala*. The fact that certain logical tropes that are prominent in Madhyamaka works, in particular *chala* and *vitaṇḍā*, are extensively dealt with in the Nyāya Sūtra is yet another indication that even the earliest version of the latter, which probably dealt exclusively with matters of logic and debate, was cognizant of Madhyamaka. See again note 6.

[30] *The Ethics and Selected Letters*, trans. Samuel Shirley (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1982), Part I, Def. 3.

[31] Part I, Prop. 7.

[32] An attribute constitutes the essence of a substance, Part I, Def. 4.

[33] *Metaphysics* Z.4, 7–8.

[34] Hayes, oddly, takes *kās* 8 and 10 to amount to a categorical assertion on Nāgārjuna's part that there can be no change: "We can now add the following as one of the claims that Nāgārjuna is unambiguously making: 'Nothing can undergo the process of change"' (p. 321). I, however, read these verses as making the hypothetical claim that if, as the opponent believes, there is "nature" (*prakṛti*), then there cannot be any change.

[35] Jonathan Barnes, trans. and ed., *Early Greek Philosophy* (London: Penguin Books, 1987), p. 134.

[36] Barnes, p. 132.

[37] Richard McKirahan, *Philosophy Before Socrates* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1994), p. 153, 11.6. The Barnes translation of this passages is somewhat awkwardly worded.

[38] *Abhidharmakośabhāṣyam of Vasubandhu*, ed. Prahlad Pradhan and Aruna Haldar (Patna: K. P. Jayaswal Research Institute, 1975), p. 301, 2–3.

[39] Cf. *Śūnyatāsaptati* 4: "Being (*sat*) does not arise since it exists. Non-being (*asat*) does not arise since it does not exist . . . ;" Christian Lindtner, *Nagarjuniana* (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1982), p. 37.

[40] *On Being and What There Is* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), p. 59, n. 44.

[41] Robert E. Hume, trans., *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 241.

[42] Of course, the concept of *svabhāva* found in Nāgārjuna is not to be confused with the more ancient notion of "nature" as a cosmological principle, which is documented, e.g., in the *Mahābhārata*. See V. M. Bedekar, "The Doctrines of Svabhāva and Kāla in the Mahābhārata and Other Old Sanskrit Works," *Journal of the University of Poona, Humanities Section* **13** (1961): 1–16.

[43] Hayes, p. 318.

[44] "Nor is it divided, since all alike is – neither more here . . . nor less; but it is all full of what is," Barnes, *Early Greek Thought*, p. 134. McKirahan defends the plausibility of a monistic interpretation of Parmenides, p. 169.

[45] The following is a loose paraphrase of the contents of MMK XXIV.
[46] MMK XXIV.7–12.
[47] Here I am following the interpretation of the *Prasannapadā* ad VI.1.
[48] *Prasannapadā*, p. 75, 11 ff.
[49] *Prasannapadā*, p. 76, 3 ff.
[50] Cf. MMK XIV.5: *anyad anyat pratītyānyan nānyad anyad ṛte 'nyataḥ* / *yat pratītya ca yat tasmāt tad anyan nopapadyate* //; "An other is dependent on an other; an other is not an other without an other. But that which is dependent on something cannot be other than it."
[51] He himself notoriously denies at *Vigrahavyāvartanī* 24 that he has any position.
[52] "The Grammatical Basis of Nāgārjuna's Arguments: Some Further Considerations," *Indologica Taurinensia* **8–9** (1980–81): 35–43.
[53] *Aṣṭādhyāyī* I.4.54: *svatantraḥ kartā*.
[54] *Aṣṭādhyāyī* I.4.49: *kartur īpsitatamaṃ karma*.
[55] Bhattacharya, pp. 39 ff.
[56] Lindtner, p. 131. All translations are Lindtner's, sometimes slightly amended.
[57] Lindtner, p. 133.
[58] Lindtner, p. 41.
[59] Lindtner, p. 47.
[60] *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*, trans. Burton Watson (New York: Columbia University Press, 1964), pp. 34–35.
[61] See in this connection Lindtner's discussion of the role of *prajñā* in Nāgārjuna's thought, pp. 269–277.
[62] See my *Transformative Philosophy: A Study of Śaṅkara, Fichte, and Heidegger*, (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1983).
[63] See Richard Robinson, "Some Logical Aspects of Nāgārjuna's System," *Philosophy East and West* **6** (1957): 291–308. But cf. Seyfort Ruegg, "The Uses of the Four Positions of the Catuṣkoṭi," pp. 55–56.

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NĀGĀRJUNA AND THE LIMITS OF THOUGHT

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"If you know the nature of one thing, you know the nature of all things."

Khensur Yeshe Thubten

Whatever is dependently co-arisen,
That is explained to be emptiness.
That, being a dependent designation,
Is itself the middle way. (*MMK* XXIV: 18)

Introduction

Nāgārjuna is surely one of the most difficult philosophers to interpret in any tradition. His texts are terse and cryptic. He does not shy away from paradox or apparent contradiction. He is coy about identifying his opponents. The commentarial traditions grounded in his texts present a plethora of interpretations of his view. Nonetheless, his influence in the Mahāyāna Buddhist world is not only unparalleled in that tradition, but exceeds in that tradition the influence of any single Western philosopher in the West. The degree to which he is taken seriously by so many eminent Indian, Chinese, Tibetan, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese philosophers, and lately by so many Western philosophers, alone justifies attention to his corpus. Even were he not such a titanic figure historically, the depth and beauty of his thought and the austere beauty of his philosophical poetry would justify that attention. While Nāgārjuna may perplex and often infuriate, and while his texts may initially defy exegesis, anyone who spends any time with Nāgārjuna's thought inevitably develops a deep respect for this master philosopher.

One of the reasons Nāgārjuna so perplexes many who come to his texts is his seeming willingness to embrace contradictions, on the one hand, while making use of classic *reductio* arguments, implicating his endorsement of the law of noncontradiction, on the other. Another is his apparent willingness to saw off the limbs on which he sits. He asserts that there are two truths, and that they are one; that everything both exists and does not exist; that nothing is existent or nonexistent; that he rejects all philosophical views including his own; that he asserts nothing. And he appears to mean every word of it. Making sense of all of this is sometimes difficult. Some interpreters of Nāgārjuna, indeed, succumb to the easy temptation to read him as a simple mystic or an irrationalist of some kind. But it is significant that none of

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the important commentarial traditions in Asia, however much they disagree in other respects, regard him in this light.[1] And, indeed, most recent scholarship is unanimous in this regard as well, again despite a wide range of divergence in interpretations in other respects. Nāgārjuna is simply too committed to rigorous analytical argument to be dismissed as a mystic.

Our interest here is neither historical nor in providing a systematic exegesis or assessment of any of Nāgārjuna's work. Instead, we are concerned with the possibility that Nāgārjuna, like many philosophers in the West, and indeed like many of his Buddhist successors—perhaps as a consequence of his influence—discovers and explores true contradictions arising at the limits of thought. If this is indeed the case, it would account for both sides of the interpretive tension just noted: Nāgārjuna might appear to be an irrationalist by virtue of embracing some contradictions—both to Western philosophers and to Nyāya interlocutors, who see consistency as a necessary condition of rationality. But to those who share with us a dialetheist's comfort with the possibility of true contradictions commanding rational assent, for Nāgārjuna to endorse such contradictions would not *undermine* but instead would *confirm* the impression that he is indeed a highly rational thinker.[2]

We are also interested in the possibility that these contradictions are structurally analogous to those arising in the Western tradition. But while discovering a parallel between Nāgārjuna's thought and those of other paraconsistent frontiersmen such as Kant, Hegel, Heidegger, and Derrida may help Western philosophers to understand Nāgārjuna's project better, or at least might be a philosophical curio, we think we can deliver more than that: we will argue that while Nāgārjuna's contradictions are structurally similar to those that we find in the West, Nāgārjuna delivers to us a paradox as yet unknown in the West. This paradox, we will argue, brings us a new insight into ontology and into our cognitive access to the world. We should read Nāgārjuna, then, not because in him we can see affirmed what we already knew, but because we can learn from him.

One last set of preliminary remarks is in order before we get down to work: in this essay we will defend neither the reading of Nāgārjuna's texts that we adopt here, nor the cogency of dialethic logic, nor the claim that true contradictions satisfying the Inclosure Schema in fact emerge at the limits of thought. We will sketch these views, but will do so fairly baldly. This is not because we take these positions to be self-evident, but because each of us has defended our respective bits of this background elsewhere. This essay will be about bringing Nāgārjuna and dialetheism together. Finally, we do not claim that Nāgārjuna himself had explicit views about logic, or about the limits of thought. We do, however, think that if he did, he had the views we are about to sketch. This is, hence, not textual history but rational reconstruction.

Inclosures and the Limits of Thought

In the *Tractatus,* Wittgenstein takes on the project of delimiting what can be thought. He says in the Preface:

> Thus the aim of the book is to draw a limit to thought, or rather—not to thought, but to the expression of thoughts: for in order to be able to draw a limit to thought, we should have to find both sides thinkable (i.e., we should have to be able to think what cannot be thought). It will therefore be only in language that the limit can be drawn, and what lies on the other side of the limit will simply be nonsense. ([1921] 1988, p. 3)

Yet, even having reformulated the problem in terms of language, the enterprise still runs into contradiction. In particular, the account of what can be said has as a consequence that it itself, and other things like it, cannot be said. Hence, we get the famous penultimate proposition of the *Tractatus:*

> My propositions serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical, when he has used them—as steps—to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) ([1921] 1988, p. 74)

Wittgenstein's predicament is serious. No matter that we throw away the ladder *after* we have climbed it: its rungs were nonsensical *while* we were using them as well. So how could it have successfully scaffolded our ascent? And if it didn't, on what basis are we now to agree that all of that useful philosophy was nonsense all along? This predicament, however, is not peculiar to him. It is a quite general feature of theories that try to characterize the limits of our cognitive abilities to think, describe, grasp, that they end up implying that they themselves cannot be thought, described, or grasped. Yet it would appear that they can be thought, described, and grasped. Otherwise, what on earth is the theory doing?

Thus, for example, when Sextus claims in *Outlines of Pyrrhonism* that it is impossible to assert anything about things beyond appearances, he would seem to be asserting just such a thing; and when he argues that no such assertion is justified, this must apply to his own assertion as well. When Kant says that it is impossible to know anything about, or apply any categories to, the noumenal realm, he would seem to be doing just what cannot be done. When Russell attempts to solve the paradoxes of self-reference by claiming that it is impossible to quantify over *all* objects, he does just that. And the list goes on. Anyone who disparages the philosophical traditions of the East on account of their supposed flirtation with paradox has a lot of the West to explain away.

Of course, the philosophers we just mentioned were well aware of the situation, and all of them tried to take steps to avoid the contradiction. Arguably, they were not successful. Even more striking: characteristically, such attempts seem to end up in other instances of the very contradictions they are trying to avoid. The recent literature surrounding the Liar Paradox provides a rich diet of such examples.[3]

Now, why does this striking pattern occur again and again? The simplest answer is that when people are driven to contradictions in charting the limits of thought, it is precisely because those limits are themselves contradictory. Hence, any theory of the limits that is anywhere near adequate will be inconsistent. The recurrence of the encounter with limit contradictions is therefore the basis of an argument to the best explanation for the inconsistent nature of the limits themselves. (It is not

the only argument. But other arguments draw on details of the particular limits in question.[4])

The contradictions at the limits of thought have a general and bipartite structure. The first part is an argument to the effect that a certain view, usually about the nature of the limit in question, transcends that limit (cannot be conceived, described, etc.). This is *Transcendence*. The other is an argument to the effect that the view *is* within the limit—*Closure*. Often, this argument is a practical one, based on the fact that Closure is demonstrated in the very act of theorizing about the limits. At any rate, together, the pair describe a structure that can conveniently be called an *inclosure:* a totality, Ω and an object, o, such that o both is and is not in Ω.

On closer analysis, inclosures can be found to have a more detailed structure. At its simplest, the structure is as follows. The inclosure comes with an operator, δ, which, when applied to any suitable subset of Ω, gives *another* object that is in Ω (that is, one that is not in the subset in question, but is in Ω). Thus, for example, if we are talking about sets of ordinals, δ might apply to give us the least ordinal not in the set. If we are talking about a set of entities that have been thought about, δ might give us an entity of which we have not yet thought. The contradiction at the limit arises when δ is applied to the totality Ω itself. For then the application of δ gives an object that is both within and without Ω: the least ordinal greater than all ordinals, or the unthought object.

All of the above is cataloged in Graham Priest, *Beyond the Limits of Thought* (Priest 2002). The catalog of limit contradictions there is not exhaustive, though. In particular, it draws only on Western philosophy. In what follows, we will add to the list the contradictions at the limits of thought discovered by Nāgārjuna. As we will see, these, too, fit the familiar pattern. The fact that they do so, while coming from a quite different tradition, shows that the pattern is even less parochial than one might have thought. This should not, of course, be surprising: if the limits of thought really are contradictory, then they should appear so from both east and west of the Euphrates.

One way in which Nāgārjuna does differ from the philosophers we have so far mentioned, though, is that he does not try to avoid the contradiction at the limits of thought. He both sees it clearly and endorses it. (In the Western tradition, few philosophers other than Hegel and some of his successors have done this.) Moreover, Nāgārjuna seems to have hit upon a limit contradiction unknown in the West, and to suggest connections between ontological and semantic contradictions worthy of attention.

To Nāgārjuna, then.

Conventional and Ultimate Reality

Central to Nāgārjuna's view is his doctrine of the two realities. There is, according to Nāgārjuna, conventional reality and ultimate reality. Correspondingly, there are two truths: conventional truth, that is, the truth about conventional reality, and ultimate truth, or the truth about the ultimate reality—*qua* ultimate reality.[5] For this reason,

discussion of Nāgārjuna's view is often phrased in terms of two truths, rather than two realities.

The things that are conventionally true are the truths concerning the empirical world. Nāgārjuna generally calls this class of truths *saṃvṛti-satya,* or occasionally *vyavahāra-satya*. The former is explained by Nāgārjuna's commentator Candrakīrti to be ambiguous. The first sense—the one most properly translated into English as "conventional truth (reality)" (Tibetan: *tha snyad bden pa*)—is itself in three ways ambiguous. On the one hand, it can mean *ordinary,* or *everyday.* In this sense a conventional truth is a truth to which we would ordinarily assent—common sense augmented by good science. The second of these three meanings is *truth by agreement.* In this sense, the decision in Australia to drive on the left establishes a conventional truth about the proper side of the road. A different decision in the U.S.A. establishes another. Conventional truth is, in this sense, often quite relative. (Candrakīrti argues that, in fact, in the first sense it is also relative—relative to our sense organs, conceptual scheme, etc. In this respect he would agree with such Pyrrhonian skeptics as Sextus.) The final sense of this cluster is *nominally true*. To be true in this sense is to be true by virtue of a particular linguistic convention. So, for instance, the fact that shoes and boots are different kinds of things here, but are both instances of one kind in Tibetan—*lham*—makes their co-specificity or lack thereof a nominal matter. We English speakers, on the other hand, regard sparrows and crows both as members of a single natural superordinate kind, *bird.* Native Tibetan speakers distinguish the *bya* (the full-sized avian) from the *bya'u* (the smaller relative). (Again, relativism about truth in this sense lurks in the background.)

But these three senses cluster as one family against which stands yet another principal meaning of *saṃvṛti*. It can also mean *concealing, hiding, obscuring, occluding*. In this sense (aptly captured by the Tibetan *kun rdzob bden pa,* literally "costumed truth") a *saṃvṛti-satya* is something that conceals the truth, or its real nature, or, as it is sometimes glossed in the tradition, something that is regarded as a truth by an obscured or a deluded mind. Now, the Madhyamaka tradition, following Candrakīrti, makes creative use of this ambiguity, noting, for instance, that what such truths conceal is precisely the fact that they are merely conventional (in any of the senses adumbrated above) or that an obscured mind is obscured precisely by virtue of not properly understanding the role of convention in constituting truth, et cetera.

This lexicographic interlude is important primarily so that when we explore Nāgārjuna's distinction between the conventional and the ultimate truth (reality), and between conventional and ultimate perspectives—the distinct stances toward the world that Nāgārjuna distinguishes, taken by ordinary versus enlightened beings—the word "conventional" is understood with this cluster of connotations, all present in Nāgārjuna's treatment. Our primary concern as we get to the heart of this exploration will be, however, with the notion of ultimate truth (reality) (*paramārtha-satya,* literally "truth of the highest meaning," or "truth of the highest object"). This we can define negatively as the way things are, considered independently of convention, or positively as the way things are, when understood by a fully enlightened

being who does not mistake what is really conventional for something that belongs to the very nature of things.

What is ultimate truth/reality, according to Nāgārjuna? To understand this, we have to understand the notion of emptiness, which for Nāgārjuna is emphatically *not* nonexistence but, rather, interdependent existence. For something to have an essence (Tibetan: *rang bzhin;* Sanskrit: *svabhāva*) is for it to be what it is, in and of itself, independently of all other things. (This entails, incidentally, that things that are essentially so are eternally so; for if they started to be, or ceased to be, then their so being would depend on other things, such as time.) To be empty is precisely to have no essence, in this sense.

The most important ultimate truth, according to Nāgārjuna, is that everything is empty. Much of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* (henceforth *MMK*) consists, in fact, of an extended set of arguments to the effect that everything that one might take to be an essence is, in fact, not so—that everything is empty of essence and of independent identity. The arguments are interesting and varied, and we will not go into them here. But just to give the flavor of them, a very general argument is to be found in *MMK* V. Here, Nāgārjuna argues that the spatial properties (and, by analogy, all properties) of an object cannot be essential. For it would be absurd to suppose that the spatial location of an object could exist without the object itself—or, conversely, that there could be an object without location. Hence, location and object are interdependent.

> From this it follows that there is no characterized
> And no existing characteristic. (*MMK* V: 4a, b)

The existence in question here is, of course, ultimate existence. Nāgārjuna is not denying the conventional existence of objects and their properties.

With arguments such as the preceding one, Nāgārjuna establishes that everything is empty, contingently dependent on other things—dependently co-arisen, as it is often put.

We must take the "everything" here very seriously, though. When Nāgārjuna claims that everything is empty, "everything" includes emptiness itself. The emptiness of something is itself a dependently co-arisen property of that thing. The emptiness of emptiness is perhaps one of the most central claims of the *MMK*.[6] Nāgārjuna devotes much of chapter 7 to this topic. In that chapter, using some of the more difficult arguments of the *MMK,* he reduces to absurdity the assumption that dependent co-arising is itself an (ultimately) existing property of things. We will not go into the argument here: it is its consequences that will concern us.

For Western philosophers it is very tempting to adopt a Kantian understanding of Nāgārjuna (as is offered, e.g., in Murti 1955). Identify conventional reality with the phenomenal realm, and ultimate reality with the noumenal, and there you have it. But this is not Nāgārjuna's view. The emptiness of emptiness means that ultimate reality cannot be thought of as a *Kantian* noumenal realm. For *ultimate* reality is just as empty as *conventional* reality. Ultimate reality is hence only conventionally real! The distinct realities are therefore identical. As the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa-sūtra* puts it,

"To say this is conventional and this is ultimate is dualistic. To realize that there is no difference between the conventional and the ultimate is to enter the Dharma-door of nonduality," or, as the *Heart Sūtra* puts it more famously, "Form is empty; emptiness is form; form is not different from emptiness; emptiness is not different from form." The identity of the two truths has profound soteriological implications for Nāgārjuna, such as the identity of nirvāṇa and saṃsāra.[7]

But we will not go into these. We are now nearly in a position to address the first of Nāgārjuna's limit contradictions.

Nāgārjuna and the Law of Noncontradiction

Before we do this, however, there is one more preliminary matter we need to examine: Nāgārjuna's attitude toward the law of noncontradiction in the domain of conventional truth. For to charge Nāgārjuna with irrationalism, or even with an extreme form of dialetheism, according to which contradictions are as numerous as blackberries, is, in part, to charge him with thinking that contradictions are true in the standard conventional realm. Although this view is commonly urged (see, e.g., Robinson 1957 and Wood 1994), it is wrong. Although Nāgārjuna does endorse contradictions, they are not of a kind that concern conventional reality qua conventional reality.

We can get at this point in two ways. First, we can observe that Nāgārjuna himself never asserts that there are true contradictions in this realm (or, more cautiously, that every apparent assertion of a contradiction concerning this domain, upon analysis, resolves itself into something else). Second, we can observe that Nāgārjuna takes *reductio* arguments to be decisive in this domain. We confess: neither of these strategies is hermeneutically unproblematic. The first relies on careful and sometimes controversial readings of Nāgārjuna's dialectic. We will argue, using a couple of cases, that such readings are correct. Moreover, we add, such readings are defended in the canonical tradition by some of the greatest Madhyamaka exegetes.

The second strategy is hard because, typically, Nāgārjuna's arguments are directed as *ad hominem* arguments against specific positions defended by his adversaries, each of whom would endorse the law of noncontradiction. If we argue that Nāgārjuna rejects the positions they defend by appealing to contradictory consequences of opponents' positions that he regards as refutatory, it is always open to the irrationalist interpreter of Nāgārjuna to reply that for the argument to be successful one needs to regard these only as refutations *for the opponent.* That is, according to this reading, Nāgārjuna himself could be taken not to be finding contradictory consequences as problematic, but to be presenting a consequence unacceptable to a consistent opponent, thereby forcing his opponent to relinquish the position on the opponent's own terms. And indeed such a reading is cogent. So if we are to give this line of argument any probative force, we will have to show that in particular cases Nāgārjuna *himself* rejects the contradiction and *endorses* the conventional claim whose negation entails the contradiction. We will present such examples.

Let us first consider the claim that Nāgārjuna himself freely asserts contradictions. One might think, for instance, that when Nāgārjuna says that

> Therefore, space is not an entity.
> It is not a nonentity.
> Not characterized, not without character.
> The same is true of the other five elements (*MMK* V : 7)

he is endorsing the claim that space and the other fundamental elements have contradictory properties (existence and nonexistence, being characterized and being uncharacterized). But this reading would only be possible if one (as we have just done) lifts this verse out of context. The entire chapter in which it occurs is addressed to the problem of reification—to treating the elements as providing an ontological foundation for all of reality, that is, as essences. After all, he concludes in the very next verse:

> Fools and reificationists who perceive
> The existence and nonexistence
> Of objects
> Do not see the pacification of objectification. (*MMK* V : 8)

It is then clear that Nāgārjuna is not *asserting* that space and the other elements have contradictory properties. Rather, he is rejecting a certain framework in which they play the role of ultimate foundations, or the role of ultimate property bearers.

Moreover, although Western and non-Buddhist Indian commentators have urged that such claims are contradictory, we also note that they are not even prima facie contradictions unless one presupposes both the law of the excluded middle and that Nāgārjuna himself endorses that law. Otherwise there is no way of getting from a verse that explicitly rejects both members of the pair "Space is an entity" and "Space is a nonentity" to the claim that, by virtue of rejecting each, he is accepting its negation and hence that he is asserting a contradiction. Much better to read Nāgārjuna as rejecting the excluded middle for the kind of assertion the opponent in question is making, packed as it is with what Nāgārjuna regards as illicit ontological presupposition (Garfield 1995).

Let us consider a second example. In his discussion of the aggregates, another context in which his concern is to dispose of the project of fundamental ontology, Nāgārjuna says:

> The assertion that the effect and cause are similar
> Is not acceptable.
> The assertion that they are not similar
> Is also not acceptable. (*MMK* IV : 6)

Again, absent context, and granted the law of the excluded middle, this appears to be a bald contradiction. And again, context makes all the difference. The opponent in this chapter has been arguing that form itself (material substance) can be thought of as the cause of all psychophysical phenomena. In the previous verse Nāgārjuna has just admonished the opponent to "think about form, but / Do not construct

theories about form" (5c–d). The point of this verse is just that form, *per se,* is a plausible explanation neither of the material world (this would beg the question) nor of the nonmaterial world (it fails to explain psychophysical relations). We are not concerned here with whether Nāgārjuna is right or wrong in these cases. We want to point out only that in cases like this, where it might appear that Nāgārjuna does assert contradictions, it is invariably the case that a careful reading of the text undermines the straightforwardly contradictory reading. And once again, we note that when it is read with logical circumspection, we have here, in any case, only a rejection in a particular context of the law of the excluded middle, and no warrant for moving from that rejection to any rejection of noncontradiction.

We now turn to the fact that Nāgārjuna employs *reductio* arguments in order to refute positions he rejects, showing that at least with regard to standard conventional situations, the fact that a claim entails contradictions is good reason to reject it. In chapter 15 of the *MMK,* Nāgārjuna considers the possibility that what it is to exist and what it is to have a particular identity is to be explained by an appeal to essence. But he is able to conclude that

> Those who see essence and essential difference
> And entities and nonentities,
> They do not see
> The truth taught by the Buddha (*MMK* XVI : 6)

precisely on the grounds that

> If there is no essence,
> What could become other?
> If there is essence,
> What could become other? (*MMK* XV: 9)

In this argument, in lines c and d—the rest of whose details, and the question of the soundness of which, we leave aside for present purposes—Nāgārjuna notes that an account of existence, change, and difference that appeals to essence leads to a contradiction. Things do "become other." That is a central thesis of the Buddhist doctrine of impermanence that Nāgārjuna defends in the text. But if they do, he argues, and if essence were explanatory of their existence, difference, and change, they would need both to have essence, in order to account for their existence, and to lack it, by virtue of the fact that essences are eternal. Since this is contradictory, essence is to be rejected. And of course, as we have already noted, Nāgārjuna does reject essence. That is the central motivation of the text.

In chapter 17 Nāgārjuna responds to the opponent's suggestion that action may be something uncreated (XVII : 23), a desperate ploy to save the idea that actions have essences. He responds that

> All conventions would then
> Be contradicted, without doubt.
> It would be impossible to draw a distinction
> Between virtue and evil. (*MMK* XVII : 24)

Again, neither the details of the argument nor its success concerns us here. Rather, we emphasize the fact that, for Nāgārjuna, contradictory consequences of positions in the standard conventional realm are fatal to these positions.

As a final example, we note that in chapter 18 Nāgārjuna concludes:

> Whatever comes into being dependent on another
> Is not identical to that thing.
> Nor is it different from it.
> Therefore it is neither nonexistent in time nor permanent. (*MMK* XVIII : 10)

Here Nāgārjuna notes that the contradiction (not identical / not different) follows from the disjunction, "An entity is either nonexistent or permanent," and so opts for the claim that existent phenomena are impermanent. We conclude, then, that not only does Nāgārjuna not freely assert contradictions but also, when he employs them, at least when discussing standard conventional truth, he does so as the conclusions of *reductio* arguments, whose point is to defend the negation of the claim he takes to entail these contradictions.

At this stage, then, we draw the following conclusions: Nāgārjuna is not an irrationalist. He is committed to the canons of rational argument and criticism. He is not a mystic. He believes that reasoned argument can lead to the abandonment of error and to knowledge. He is not of the view that the conventional world, however nominal it may be, is riddled with contradictions.[8] If Nāgārjuna is to assert contradictions, they will be elsewhere, they will be defended rationally, and they will be asserted in the service of reasoned analysis.

The Ultimate Truth Is That There Is No Ultimate Truth

We are now in a position to examine Nāgārjuna's first limit contradiction. The centerpiece of his Madhyamaka or "middle way" philosophy is the thesis that everything is empty. This thesis has a profound consequence. Ultimate truths are those about ultimate reality. But since everything is empty, there is no ultimate reality. There are, therefore, no ultimate truths. We can get at the same conclusion another way. To express anything in language is to express truth that depends on language, and so this cannot be an expression of the way things are ultimately. All truths, then, are merely conventional.

Nāgārjuna enunciates this conclusion in the following passages:

> The Victorious ones have said
> That Emptiness is the relinquishing of all views.
> For whomever emptiness becomes a view
> That one will accomplish nothing. (*MMK* XIII : 8)
>
> I prostrate to Gautama
> Who, through compassion
> Taught the true doctrine
> Which leads to the relinquishing of all views. (*MMK* XXVII : 30)

Nāgārjuna is not saying here that one must be reduced to total silence. He himself

certainly was not! The views that one must relinquish are views about the ultimate nature of reality. And there is no such thing as the ultimate nature of reality. That is what it is for all phenomena to be empty.

It might be thought that the rest is simply ineffable. Indeed, Nāgārjuna is sometimes interpreted in this way, too (Gorampa 1990). But this, also, would be too simplistic a reading. There *are* ultimate truths. The *MMK* is full of them. For example, when Nāgārjuna says

> Something that is not dependently arisen
> Such a thing does not exist.
> Therefore a nonempty thing
> Does not exist (*MMK* XXIV: 19)

he is telling us about the nature of ultimate reality. There are, therefore, ultimate truths. Indeed, that there is no ultimate reality is itself a truth about ultimate reality and is therefore an ultimate truth! This is Nāgārjuna's first limit contradiction.

There are various objections one might raise at this point in an attempt to save Nāgārjuna from (ultimate) inconsistency. Let us consider two. First, one might say that when Nāgārjuna appears to assert ultimate truths, he is not *really* asserting anything. His utterances have some other function. One might develop this point in at least two different ways. First, one might say that Nāgārjuna's speech acts are to be taken not as acts of assertion but as acts of denial. It is as though, whenever someone else makes a claim about ultimate reality, Nāgārjuna simply says "No!" This is to interpret Nāgārjuna as employing a relentless *via negativa*. Alternatively, one might say that in these utterances Nāgārjuna is not performing a speech act at all: he is merely uttering words with no illocutory force. In the same way, one may interpret Sextus as claiming that he, also, never made assertions: he simply *uttered* words, which, when understood by his opponents, would cause them to give up their views.[9]

While these strategies have some plausibility (and some ways of reading Bhāvaviveka and Candrakīrti have them interpreting Nāgārjuna in just this way), in the end the text simply cannot sustain this reading. There are just too many important passages in the *MMK* in which Nāgārjuna is not simply denying what his opponents say, or saying things that will cause his opponents to retract, but where he is stating positive views of his own. Consider, for example, the central verse of the *MMK:*

> Whatever is dependently co-arisen,
> That is explained to be emptiness.
> That, being a dependent designation,
> Is itself the middle way. (*MMK* XXIV: 18)

Or consider Nāgārjuna's assertion that nirvāṇa and saṃsāra are identical:

> Whatever is the limit of nirvāṇa,
> That is the limit of cyclic existence.
> There is not even the slightest difference between them,
> Or even the subtlest thing. (*MMK* XXV: 20)

These are telling it like it is.

The strategy of claiming that, in the relevant portions of the text, Nāgārjuna is not making assertions gains some exegetical plausibility from the fact that sometimes Nāgārjuna can be interpreted as describing his own utterances in this way. The *locus classicus* is the *Vigrahavyāvartanī,* where Nāgārjuna responds to a Nyāya charge that he has undermined his own claim to the emptiness of all things through his own commitment to his assertions. In his autocommentary to verse 29, he says:

> If I had even one proposition thereby it would be just as you have said. Although if I had a proposition with the characteristic that you described I would have that fault, I have no proposition at all. Thus, since all phenomena are empty, at peace, by nature isolated, how could there be a proposition? How can there be a characteristic of a proposition? And how can there be a fault arising from the characteristic of a proposition? Thus, the statement "through the characteristic of your proposition you come to acquire the fault" is not true.

But context and attention to the structure of the argument make all the hermeneutic difference here. The Nyāya interlocutor has charged Nāgārjuna not simply with *asserting things* but with a self-refutatory commitment to the existence of convention-independent truth-makers (propositions—*pratijñā*) for the things he says, on pain of abandoning claims to the truth of his own theory. Nāgārjuna's reply does not deny that he is asserting anything. How could he deny *that*? Rather he *asserts* that his use of words does not commit him to the existence of any convention-independent phenomena (such as emptiness) to which those words refer. What he denies is a particular semantic theory, one he regards as incompatible with his doctrine of the emptiness of all things precisely because it is committed to the claim that things have natures (Garfield 1996). Compare, in this context, Wittgenstein's rejection of the theory of meaning of the *Tractatus,* with its extralinguistic facts and propositions, in favor of the use-theory of the *Investigations*. We conclude that even the most promising textual evidence for this route to saving Nāgārjuna from inconsistency fails.

A second way one might interpret Nāgārjuna so as to save him from inconsistency is to suggest that the assertions Nāgārjuna proffers that appear to be statements of ultimate truth state merely conventional, and not ultimate, truths after all. One might defend this claim by pointing out that these truths can indeed be expressed, and inferring that they therefore *must* be conventional, otherwise they would be ineffable. If this were so, then to say that there are no ultimate truths would simply be *true,* and *not* false. But this reading is also hard to sustain. For something to be an ultimate truth is for it to be the way a thing is found to be at the end of an analysis of its nature. When, for instance, a mādhyamika says that things are ultimately empty, that claim can be cashed out by saying that when we analyze that thing, looking for its essence, we literally come up empty. The analysis never terminates with anything that can stand as an essence. But another way of saying this is to say that the result of this ultimate analysis is the discovery that all things are empty, and that they can be no other way. This, hence, is an ultimate truth about them. We might point out that

the Indo-Tibetan exegetical tradition, despite lots of other internecine disputes, is unanimous on this point.

There is, then, no escape. Nāgārjuna's view is contradictory.[10] The contradiction is, clearly, a paradox of expressibility. Nāgārjuna succeeds in saying the unsayable, just as much as Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus.* We can think (and characterize) reality only subject to language, which is conventional, so the ontology of that reality is all conventional. It follows that the conventional objects of reality do not ultimately (nonconventionally) exist. It also follows that nothing we say of them is ultimately true. That is, all things are empty of ultimate existence, and this is their ultimate nature and is an ultimate truth about them. They hence cannot be thought to have that nature, nor can we say that they do. But we have just done so. As Mark Siderits (1989) has put it, "the ultimate truth is that there is no ultimate truth."

Positive and Negative Tetralemmas: Conventional and Ultimate Perspectives

It may be useful to approach the contradiction at the limits of expressibility here by a different route: Nāgārjuna's unusual use of both positive and negative forms of the *catushkoṭi,* or classical Indian tetralemma. Classical Indian logic and rhetoric regards any proposition as defining a logical space involving four candidate positions, or corners *(koṭi),* in distinction to most Western logical traditions, which consider only two—truth and falsity. The proposition may be true (and not false), false (and not true), both true and false, or neither true nor false. As a consequence, Indian epistemology and metaphysics, including Buddhist epistemology and metaphysics, typically partitions each problem space defined by a property into four possibilities, not two.[11] So Nāgārjuna in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* considers the possibility that motion, for instance, is in the moving object, not in the moving object, both in and not in the moving object, and neither in nor not in the moving object. Each prima facie logical possibility needs analysis before rejection.

Nāgārjuna makes use both of positive and negative tetralemmas and uses this distinction in mood to mark the difference between the perspectives of the two truths. Positive tetralemmas, such as this, are asserted from the conventional perspective:

> That there is a self has been taught,
> And the doctrine of no-self,
> By the buddhas, as well as the
> Doctrine of neither self nor nonself. (*MMK* XVIII : 6)

Some, of course, interpret these as evidence for the irrationalist interpretation of Nāgārjuna that we defused a few minutes ago. But if we are not on the lookout for contradictory readings of this, we can see Nāgārjuna explaining simply how the policy of two truths works in a particular case. Conventionally, he says, there is a self—the conventional selves that we recognize as persisting from day to day, such as Jay and Graham, exist. But selves don't exist ultimately. They both exist conventionally and are empty, and so fail to exist ultimately—indeed, these are exactly the

same thing. This verse therefore records neither inconsistency nor incompleteness. Rather, it affirms the two truths and demonstrates that we can talk coherently about both, and about their relationship—from the conventional perspective, of course.

The distinctively Nāgārjunian negative tetralemmas are more interesting. Here Nāgārjuna is after the limits of expressibility, and the contradictory situation at that limit when we take the ultimate perspective:

> "Empty" should not be asserted.
> "Nonempty" should not be asserted.
> Neither both nor neither should be asserted.
> These are used only nominally. (*MMK* XXII : 11)

The last line makes it clear (as does context in the text itself) that Nāgārjuna is discussing what can't be said from the ultimate perspective—from a point of view transcendent of the conventional. And it turns out here that *nothing* can be said, even that all phenomena are empty. Nor its negation. We can't even say that nothing can be said. But we just did. And we have thereby characterized the ultimate perspective, which, if we are correct in our characterization, can't be done.

The relationship between these two kinds of tetralemma generates a higher-order contradiction as well. They say the same thing: each describes completely (although from different directions) the relationship between the two truths. The positive tetralemma asserts that conventional phenomena exist conventionally and can be characterized truly from that perspective, and that ultimately nothing exists or satisfies any description. In saying this, it in no way undermines its own cogency, and in fact affirms and explains its own expressibility. The negative counterpart asserts the same thing: that existence and characterization make sense at, and only at, the conventional level, and that, at the ultimate level, nothing exists or satisfies any description. But in doing so it contradicts itself: if true, it asserts its own non-assertability. The identity of the prima facie opposite two truths is curiously mirrored in the opposition of the prima facie identical two tetralemmas.

All Things Have One Nature, That Is, No Nature

We have examined the contradiction concerning the limits of expressibility that arises for Nāgārjuna. But as will probably be clear already, there is another, and more fundamental, contradiction that underlies this. This is the ontological contradiction concerning emptiness itself. All things, including emptiness itself, are, as we have seen, empty. As Nāgārjuna puts it in a verse that is at the heart of the *MMK:*

> Whatever is dependently co-arisen,
> That is explained to be emptiness.
> That, being a dependent designation,
> Is itself the middle way. (*MMK* XXIV : 18)

Now, since all things are empty, all things lack any ultimate nature, and this is a characterization of what things are like from the ultimate perspective. Thus, ulti-

mately, things are empty. But emptiness is, by definition, the lack of any essence or ultimate nature. Nature, or essence, is just what empty things are empty of. Hence, ultimately, things must lack emptiness. To be ultimately empty is, ultimately, to lack emptiness. In other words, emptiness is the nature of all things; by virtue of this they have no nature, not even emptiness. As Nāgārjuna puts it in his autocommentary to the *Vigrahavyāvartanī,* quoting lines from the *Aṣṭasahasrika-prajñāpāramitā-sūtra:* "All things have one nature, that is, no nature."

Nāgārjuna's enterprise is one of fundamental ontology, and the conclusion he comes to is that fundamental ontology is impossible. But that is a fundamentally ontological conclusion—and that is the paradox. There is no way that things are ultimately, not even that way. The Indo-Tibetan tradition, following the *Vimalakīrti-nirdeśa-sūtra,* hence repeatedly advises one to learn to "tolerate the groundlessness of things." The emptiness of emptiness is the fact that not even emptiness exists ultimately, that it is also dependent, conventional, nominal, and, in the end, that it is just the everydayness of the everyday. Penetrating to the depths of being, we find ourselves back on the surface of things, and so discover that there is nothing, after all, beneath these deceptive surfaces. Moreover, what is deceptive about them is simply the fact that we take there to be ontological depths lurking just beneath.

There are, again, ways that one might attempt to avoid the ontological contradiction. One way is to say that Nāgārjuna's utterances about emptiness are not assertions at all. We have discussed this move in connection with the previous limit contradiction. Another way, in this context, is to argue that even though Nāgārjuna is asserting that everything is empty, the emptiness in question must be understood as an accident, and not an essence, to use Aristotelian jargon. Again, although this exegetical strategy may have some plausibility, it cannot be sustained. For things do not simply *happen* to be empty, as some things *happen* to be red. The arguments of the *MMK* are designed to show that all things cannot but be empty, that there is no other mode of existence of which they are capable. Since emptiness is a necessary characteristic of things, it belongs to them essentially—it is part of the very nature of phenomena per se. As Candrakīrti puts it, commenting on *MMK* XIII : 8:

> As it is said in the great *Ratnakūṭa-sūtra,* "Things are not empty because of emptiness; to be a thing is to be empty. Things are not without defining characteristics through characteristiclessness; to be a thing is to be without a defining characteristic. . . . [W]hoever understands things in this way, Kaśyapa, will understand perfectly how everything has been explained to be in the middle path."

To be *is* to be empty. That is what it is to be. It is no accidental property; it is something's nature—although, being empty, it has no nature.

This paradox is deeply related to the first one that we discussed. One might fairly ask, as have many on both sides of this planet, just *why* paradoxes of expressibility arise. The most obvious explanations might appear to be semantic in character, adverting only to the nature of language. One enamored of Tarski's treatment of truth in a formal language might, for instance, take such a route. One might then regard limit paradoxes as indicating a limit*ation* of language, an inadequacy to a reality that

must itself be consistent, and whose consistency would be mirrored in an *adequate* language. But Nāgārjuna's system provides an ontological explanation and a very different attitude toward these paradoxes, and, hence, to language. Reality has no nature. Ultimately, it is not in any way at all. So nothing can be said about it. Essencelessness thus induces non-characterizability. But, on the other side of the street, emptiness is an ultimate character of things. And this fact can ground the (ultimate) truth of what we have just said. The paradoxical linguistic utterances are therefore grounded in the contradictory nature of reality.

We think that the ontological insight of Nāgārjuna's is distinctive of the Madhyamaka; it is hard to find a parallel in the West prior to the work of Heidegger.[12] But even Heidegger does not follow Nāgārjuna all the way in the dramatic insistence on the identity of the two realities and the recovery of the authority of the conventional. This extirpation of the myth of the deep may be Nāgārjuna's greatest contribution to Western philosophy.

Nāgārjuna and Inclosure

> Everything is real and is not real,
> Both real and not real,
> Neither real nor not real.
> This is Lord Buddha's teaching. (*MMK* XVIII: 8)

Central to Nāgārjuna's understanding of emptiness as immanent in the conventional world is his doctrine of the emptiness of emptiness. That, we have seen, is what prevents the two truths from collapsing into an appearance/reality or phenomenon/noumenon distinction. But it is also what generates the contradictions characteristic of philosophy at the limits. We have encountered two of these, and have seen that they are intimately connected. The first is a paradox of expressibility: linguistic expression and conceptualization can express only conventional truth; the ultimate truth is that which is inexpressible and that which transcends these limits. So it cannot be expressed or characterized. But we have just done so. The second is a paradox of ontology: all phenomena, Nāgārjuna argues, are empty, and so ultimately have no nature. But emptiness is, therefore, the ultimate nature of things. So they both have and lack an ultimate nature.

That these paradoxes involve Transcendence should be clear. In the first case, there is an explicit claim that the ultimate truth transcends the limits of language and of thought. In the second case, Nāgārjuna claims that the character of ultimate reality transcends all natures. That they also involve Closure is also evident. In the first case, the truths are expressed and hence are within the limits of expressibility; and in the second case, the nature is given and hence is within the totality of all natures.

Now consider the Inclosure Schema, introduced earlier, in a bit more detail. It concerns properties, φ and ψ, and a function, δ, satisfying the following conditions:

(1) $\Omega = \{\chi: \varphi(\chi)\}$ exists, and $\psi(\Omega)$.
(2) For all $X \subseteq \Omega$ such that $\psi(X)$:

(i) $\neg\delta(X)\varepsilon X$ (Transcendence)
(ii) $\delta(X)\varepsilon\Omega$ (Closure)

Applying δ to Ω then gives: $\delta(\Omega)\varepsilon\Omega$ and $\neg\delta(\Omega)\varepsilon\Omega$. In a picture, we may represent the situation thus:

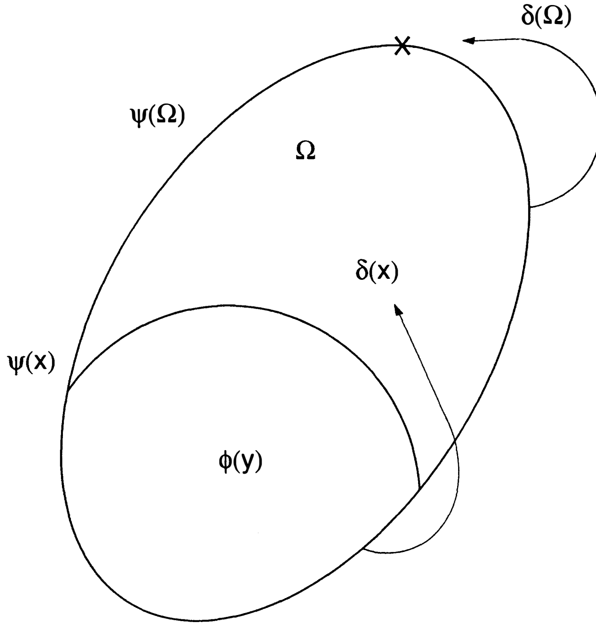


Fig. 1. Inclosure Schema.

In Nāgārjuna's ontological contradiction, an inclosure is formed by taking:

- $\varphi(\chi)$) as 'χ is empty'
- $\psi(X)$ as 'X is a set of things with some common nature'
- $\delta(X)$ as 'the nature of things in X'

To establish that this is an inclosure, we first note that $\psi(\Omega)$. For Ω is the set of things that have the nature of being empty. Now assume that $X \subseteq \Omega$ and $\psi(X)$, that is, that X is a set of things with some common nature. $\delta(X)$ is that nature, and $\delta(X\chi)\varepsilon\Omega$ since all things are empty (Closure). It follows from this that $\delta(X)$ has no nature. Hence, $\neg\delta(X)\varepsilon X$, since X is a set of things with some nature (Transcendence). The limit contradiction is that the nature of all things $\delta(\Omega)$—namely emptiness—both is and is not empty. Or, to quote Nāgārjuna, quoting the *Prajñāpāramitā,* "All things have one nature, that is, no nature."

In Nāgārjuna's expressibility contradiction, an inclosure is formed by taking:

- $\varphi(\chi)$ as 'χ is an ultimate truth'
- $\psi(X)$ as 'X is definable'

- $\delta(X)$ as the sentence 'there is nothing which is in D', where 'D' refers to X. (If X is definable, there is such a D.)

To establish that this is an inclosure, we first note that $\psi(\Omega)$. For '{χ: χ is an ultimate truth}' defines Ω.

Now assume that $X \subseteq \Omega$ and $\psi(X)$; then $\delta(X)$ is a sentence that says that nothing is in X. Call this *s*. It is an ultimate truth that there are no ultimate truths; that is, that there is nothing in Ω, and, since $X \subseteq \Omega$, it is an ultimate truth that there is nothing in X. That is, *s* is ultimately true: $s \varepsilon \Omega$ (Closure). For Transcendence, suppose that $s \varepsilon X$. Then $s \varepsilon \Omega$; that is, *s* is an ultimate truth, and so true, that is, nothing is in X. Hence, it is not the case that $s \varepsilon X$. The limit contradiction is that $\delta(\Omega)$, the claim that there are no ultimate truths, both is and is not an ultimate truth.

Thus, Nāgārjuna's paradoxes are both, precisely, inclosure contradictions. These contradictions are unavoidable once we see emptiness as Nāgārjuna characterizes it—as the lack of any determinate character. But this does not entail that Nāgārjuna is an irrationalist, a simple mystic, or crazy; on the contrary: he is prepared to go exactly where reason takes him: to the transconsistent.

Nāgārjuna's Paradox and Others Like and Unlike It

Demonstrating that Nāgārjuna's two linked limit paradoxes satisfy a schema common to a number of well-known paradoxes in Western philosophy (the Liar, Mirimanoff's, the Burali-Forti, Russell's, and the Knower, to name a few) goes further to normalizing Nāgārjuna. We thus encounter him as a philosopher among familiar, respectable, philosophers, as a fellow traveler at the limits of epistemology and metaphysics. The air of irrationalism and laissez faire mysticism is thus dissipated once and for all. If Nāgārjuna is beyond the pale, then so, too, are Kant, Hegel, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger.

This tool also allows us to compare Nāgārjuna's insights with those of his Western colleagues and to ask what, if anything, is distinctive about his results. We suggest the following: the paradox of expressibility, while interesting and important, and crucial to Nāgārjuna's philosophy of language (as well as to the development of Mahāyāna Buddhist philosophical practice throughout Central and East Asia), is not Nāgārjuna's unique contribution (although he may be the first to discover and to mobilize it, which is no mean distinction in the history of philosophy). It recurs in the West in the work of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Derrida, to name a few, and shares a structure with such paradoxes as the Liar. Discovering that Nāgārjuna shares this insight with many Western philosophers may help to motivate the study of Nāgārjuna by Westerners, but it does not demonstrate that he has any special value to us.

The ontological paradox, on the other hand—which we hereby name "Nāgārjuna's Paradox"—although, as we have seen, is intimately connected with a paradox of expressibility, is quite distinctive, and to our knowledge is found nowhere else. If Nāgārjuna is correct in his critique of essence, and if it thus turns out that

all things lack fundamental natures, it turns out that they all have the same nature, that is, emptiness, and hence both have and lack that very nature. This is a direct consequence of the purely negative character of the property of emptiness, a property Nāgārjuna first fully characterizes, and the centrality of which to philosophy he first demonstrates. Most dramatically, Nāgārjuna demonstrates that the emptiness of emptiness permits the "collapse" of the distinction between the two truths, revealing the empty to be simply the everyday, and so saves his ontology from a simple-minded dualism. Nāgārjuna demonstrates that the profound-limit contradiction he discovers sits harmlessly at the heart of all things. In traversing the limits of the conventional world, there is a twist, like that in a Möbius strip, and we find ourselves to have returned to it, now fully aware of the contradiction on which it rests.[13]

Notes

Thanks to Paul Harrison, Megan Howe, and Koji Tanaka for comments on earlier drafts of this essay and to our audience at the 2000 meeting of the Australasian Association of Philosophy and the Australasian Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, especially to Peter Forrest, Tim Oakley, and John Powers, for their comments and questions.

1 – Gorampa, in fourteenth-century Tibet, may be an exception to this claim, for in *Nges don rab gsal* he argues that Nāgārjuna regards all thought and all conceptualization as necessarily totally false and deceptive. But even Gorampa agrees that Nāgārjuna argues (and indeed soundly) for that conclusion.

2 – We note that Tillemans (1999) takes Nāgārjuna's sincere endorsement of contradictions to be possible evidence that he endorses paraconsistent logic with regard to the ultimate while remaining classical with regard to the conventional. We think he is right about this.

3 – For how this phenomenon plays out in the theories of Kripke and of Gupta and Herzberger, see Priest 1987, chap. 1; for the theory of Barwise and Etchemendy, see Priest 1993; and for McGee, see Priest 1995.

4 – See Priest 1987 and 2002 for extended discussion.

5 – The reason for the *qua* qualification will become clear shortly. It will turn out that conventional and ultimate reality are, in a sense, the same.

6 – See, e.g., Garfield 1990, 1994, 1995, 1996; Huntington and Wangchen 1989; Kasulis 1989.

7 – These are taken up most notably in the Zen tradition (Kasulis 1989).

8 – On the other hand, it is no doubt true that in Nāgārjuna's view many of our pretheoretical and philosophical conceptions regarding the world are indeed riddled with incoherence. Getting them coherent is the task of the *MMK*.

9 – Although we take no position here on any debates in Sextus' interpretation, or on whether Sextus is correct in characterizing his own method in this way.

10 – The fact that Nāgārjuna's view is inconsistent does not, of course—in his own view or in ours—mean that it is *incoherent*.

11 – See Hayes 1994 and Tillemans 1999 for excellent general discussions of the *catushkoṭi* and its role in Indian logic and epistemology.

12 – On the paradoxical nature of being in Heidegger, see Priest 2001.

13 – Kasulis (1989) appropriately draws attention to the way in which Nāgārjuna's account of the way this traversal returns us to the conventional world, but with deeper insight into its conventional character; this is taken up by the great Zen philosopher Dōgen in his account of the great death and its consequent reaffirmation of all things.

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THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

THE NUMATA YEHAN LECTURE IN BUDDHISM

Winter 2001

Tom J. F. Tillemans
Winter 2001 Chairholder
The Numata Chair in Buddhist Studies

Trying to be Fair to M€dhyamika Buddhism

Calgary, Alberta

The Lectureship

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The Lecturer

The 2001 Chairholder for the Numata Chair in Buddhist Studies was Tom Tillemans, Professor in the Faculty of Letters and Chair of Buddhist Studies at the University of Lausanne in Switzerland. Professor Tillemans holds a B.A. Honours in Philosophy from the University of British Columbia where he became interested in Tibetan language and Buddhist philosophy. He travelled and studied in India before receiving a Licence of Letters and Doctor of Letters in Sanskrit, Chinese and Philosophy at the University of Lausanne.

Professor Tillemans has held positions as research fellow at the University of Hiroshima, Professor at the University of Hamburg before being appointed as full professor and Chair of Buddhist Studies at the University of Lausanne in the section of Oriental Languages. His research projects have been sponsored by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and by the Swiss National Research Funds. Professor Tillemans' research activities have resulted in a lengthy list of book chapters, refereed articles, translations, review articles, articles in reference works and other academic enterprises.

Trying to be Fair to M€dhyamika Buddhism

Is that all there is?
(Peggy Lee)

When looking about in the computer room of the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Calgary, my eyes often fixed upon a little drawing of a stick-man with bug-eyes and wild, electric, hair. The art-work was just a piece of graffiti, nothing more than one of many doodles and scrawls, but the message hit home, because underneath this otherwise insignificant stick-man was the caption, "somebody who has really had it with that N€g€rjuna." I have no insider information as to why the artist got fed up with reading N€g€rjuna, the founder of the Buddhist Middle Way school, or M€dhyamika, but I can more or less surmise that if she (or he) was like many of us, she probably felt a kind of initial giddiness at the heady perspective of taking on and defeating the myriad systems in Indian philosophy, and then quickly became exhausted and punch-drunk as argument after argument came at her in rapid-fire succession, most or all of them being complicated and none of them seeming wholly convincing. She may well have ploughed laboriously through a chapter or two of N€g€rjuna's famous *M™lamadhyamakak€rik€*s, perhaps hitting upon Chapter XV in which every second word seemed to be *svabh€va*, variously translated as "self-existence," "own-being," and probably better rendered as "intrinsic nature." Or she may have hit upon a number of turgid grammatical arguments concerning the minutiae of whether goers go over places that are being gone over (*gamyam€na*), have been gone over (*gata*), or have not yet been, but will be, gone over (*agata*). Who knows: she might have even had a good background in basic Buddhism, but unless she also happened to have pursued the studies of a traditional Indian paNDit, specializing in P€nini and Patañjali's works on grammatical philosophy (*vy€karaŠa*), the context of this discussion about agents, actions and objects would have probably escaped her. But, whatever she read, at some point she closed the book in exasperation and perhaps asked herself something like, "Is that all there is to it—a series of very complicated moves with no way into the underlying system, if indeed there is one?" So then she took to graffiti, letting the rest of her fellow sufferers know that she had had her fill. And in many ways, I can understand her reaction, even though I will try to show that M€dhyamika texts do present significant philosophy and deserve the effort that it takes to get past the series of obscurities. I obviously can't go much further in my dialogue with an anonymous backroom cartoonist. What I would like to do is look a bit more closely at what is probably a similar, and also partly understandable, type of disappointment that has set in, at least in some professional Buddhist Studies circles, about the M€dhyamika school of thought in Buddhist philosophy.

What is the M€dhyamika? Or, first of all, the troublesome quibble: should the term be *Madhyamaka*, or *M€dhyamika*? In fact, the attempt to see the former as the word for the school of thought and the latter as the word for the adherents to this thought is, as Jacques May pointed out quite some time ago, not grounded in rigorous data from Sanskrit texts. The situation in Sanskrit is *not* parallel to that in Tibetan where *dbu ma* and *dbu ma pa* do respectively designate the philosophical system and its adherents. In short, although there is now a type of convention amongst

writers to make such a distinction between the two Sanskrit terms, it is doubtful that there is much to recommend it. Even if *Madhyamaka* might be more of a designation of the system, *M€dhyamika* is attested for both, viz. the system and its adherents.[1]

That said, turning from mention to use of the term, the M€dhyamika is one of the principal interpretations of Mah€y€na Buddhist scriptures and has a lineage of several prolific and revered thinkers in India, Tibet and China, beginning with N€g€rjuna and šryadeva in about the 3rd century C.E. and going on to Candrak…rti and Bh€vaviveka in the 6th century, KamalaCIla and <antirakSita in the 8th, and a host of illustrious Tibetan exponents, not the least of which was Tsong kha pa in the 14th and15th century. It has fascinated western writers for more than a century, including the major figures in Buddhist philology, like T. Stcherbatsky, Louis de la Vallée Poussin or Etienne Lamotte, and even some well-known philosophers, like Karl Jaspers. It is the school that has been often depicted as the pinnacle of subtlety in Buddhist thought, and notably has been taken in this way virtually unanimously by the Tibetan Buddhist tradition; in one way or another Tibetan Buddhists profess allegiance to a M€dhyamika philosophy, although there are several more or less rival indigenous and well-developed Tibetan interpretations of what the true M€dhyamika actually is. It is thus quite understandable that many practitioners of Buddhism in the West inspired by, or belonging to, one or another Tibetan school would faithfully endorse the hierarchy of Indian thought as found in the genre of Tibetan works known as *grub mtha'* or *siddh€nta*, i.e., the doxographical literature, and maintain that Buddhist philosophy culminates in the M€dhyamika.

With all this Eastern and Western superlative billing of the M€dhyamika it is not surprising that at some time or another there would be a vociferous counter-reaction, where someone would finally thumb his nose at the hyperbole and argue that "the emperor has no clothes." The first article in this direction was that of Richard Robinson, published in 1972, and entitled "Did N€g€rjuna Really Refute all Philosophical Views?"[2] For Robinson, the principal complaint was that N€g€rjuna and the M€dhyamika school were attributing to their opponents notions and positions to which these opponents themselves would never agree. The second major article was a follow-up to Robinson by Richard P. Hayes, "N€g€rjuna's Appeal,"[3] in which the author argued that not only did the M€dhyamika regularly misrepresent his opponent's positions and thus refute a man of straw, but his key arguments only appear to work because of a systematic equivocation upon the key polysemic term "intrinsic nature" (*svabh€va*); while Robinson saw a strategy of deliberate misrepresentation, Hayes added equivocation to the would-be sins of N€g€rjuna.[4] No doubt this strong negative turn is understandable. After all, what could be more irritating to a good, serious, scholar than a general idolatry of a philosophy that seemed to him to be a serious of bad arguments, misrepresentations and

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[1] See p. 472 in Jacques May, "Ch™gan," *HÇbÇgirin* V, Paris-Tokyo, 1979: 470-493.

[2] Richard H. Robinson, "Did N€g€rjuna Really Refute all Philosophical Views?" *Philosophy East and West* 22, 1972: 325-331.

[3] Richard P. Hayes, "N€g€rjuna's Appeal," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 22, 1994: 299-378.

[4] Cf. Hayes, p. 325: " To the various fallacies and tricks brought to light by Robinson in his articles, we can now add the informal fallacy of equivocation as outlined above. That is, not only did N€g€rjuna use the term "svabh€va" in ways that none of his opponents did, but he himself used it in several different senses at key points in his argument."

sloppy or deliberate plays on words. The temptation is great to buck the tide of exaggerated claims. Nonetheless, the Robinson-Hayes type of reaction is itself overly vociferous and, what is probably worse, it is a bit simplistic and unfair. Indeed, as we shall see, the later Indian and Tibetan M€dhyamika scholastic had taken up some of the accusations similar to those which Robinson and Hayes are leveling and had some solutions that involved considerable ingenuity, and in some cases, I would argue, significant insights. I think it is clear that at least the impatient tone of Robinson and Hayes articles is unfair: the M€dhyamika philosopher is much, much less of an amateur, or to put it more strongly, he is less of a trickster or fraud than Robinson and Hayes make him out to be.

It would be too involved and technical in the present context to undertake a detailed blow by blow analysis of the passages that modern critics of the M€dhyamika cite. Nor fortunately do I think we need to do this, as I think we can get our points across with a reconstruction of some general strategies in this school's argumentation. But before we delve into that, it is worthwhile to point out that the argumentation is not *just* what should make or break this philosophy or other philosophies for us. Even if certain of the different sorts of arguments that we find in these M€dhyamika texts seem unconvincing to us, as they probably often do, it would nonetheless be a mistake to thereby dismiss M€dhyamika thought. To take a parallel, I think that many people, other than perhaps certain die-hard analytic philosophers, would think it strangely narrow to dismiss the philosophies of St. Thomas Aquinas or Descartes because of the unconvincingness of the Five Ways, the cogito or the ontological argument—it would be seen as narrow because somehow these philosophies are more than just those arguments, and involve a certain systematic vision, approach and method of thinking that is of interest and can be developed further, even if many of the actual arguments that St. Thomas and Descartes themselves gave might often leave us less than converted. It may be that someone formulates other arguments to arrive at essentially Thomistic or Cartesian conclusions. So I think it could be with N€g€rjuna and the M€dhyamika: even if certain of the reasoning which he gave in the third century would leave us somewhat puzzled in the twenty-first, the philosophic vision may well be of interest and could conceivably find support in arguments quite different from those of N€g€rjuna himself. I am not going to elaborate or invent such types of arguments, but I can imagine other people doing so. In short, I think the M€dhyamika should be of interest to contemporary scholars, because the system and philosophic vision should be of interest. On the most general level the M€dhyamika is trenchantly asking the question "What is a thing?", and this question, as well as the M€dhyamika's attempted answers, should be of interest to philosophers, be they analytic philosophers concerned with issues of realism and anti-realism, or so-called "continental" philosophers, such as the Heideggerians meditating on *Die Frage nach dem Ding*.

I

For our purposes, that is, to try to re-open the debate on M€dhyamika in a fairer way and bring out some of what seems promising in the M€dhyamika vision, we need to do two things: have a working description of what M€dhyamika is and dispel, to some degree at least, the accusations of sleight of hand and amateurism.

The M€dhyamika is in the first place a philosophy that denies, across the board, that things (whatever they might be) have any intrinsic nature (*svabh€va*). This lack of intrinsic nature, or what it terms "voidness of intrinsic nature" (*svabh€vena CUnyatA*), is considered the ultimate truth (*param€rthasatya*). Now, there have been certain interpretations of M€dhyamika that have tended to go in the direction of taking this ultimate truth as a kind of absolute that is real and permanent, much more real than the phenomena of our ordinary world, which are supposedly just widespread illusions that the world shares in common due to its general ignorance of this absolute. And the M€dhyamika interpretation that no doubt goes the furthest in this direction of advocating such a real and permanent absolute separate from the illusory things of the world is no doubt the Tibetan Jo nang pa school, founded by Dol po pa Shes rab rgyal mtshan in the 13th Century, and with somewhat obscure bases in Indian textual sources. On the other hand, we also find in Indian and Tibetan literature, a carefully developed position that the ultimate, or voidness of intrinsic nature, is itself nothing more real or consistent than the ordinary things that make up our world. To say, therefore, that all those ordinary things lack intrinsic nature is not to describe a genuine reality lying behind or separate from illusion, but rather to give the final and best account of how ordinary things are; voidness, or the ultimate, is nothing in itself apart from, or more real than, the ordinary things upon which it is based—indeed this "no intrinsic nature-ness" (*ni fsvabh€vat€; nai fsv€bh€vya*) is just itself something without any intrinsic nature, no more no less.

That said, no intrinsic nature-ness is supposedly something that is difficult to realize, something extremely subtle that has a deep effect upon us when we do realize it—following the usual canonical descriptions a superficial understanding of "no intrinsic nature-ness" inspires terror, but a genuine understanding is a liberating experience.[5] Why would this realization be liberating at all and what would this liberation be like? Of course, there are elaborate scholastic accounts as to how this liberation comes about, who has it and when. However, I think the fundamental M€dhyamika stance is that people's thought and language is through and through pervaded with error, so that there is an almost instinctive error about the world, reifying the world and taking this distorted version of things as being consistent, possessing intrinsic natures, and existing independent of our thoughts about it. The emotional and ethical life of people is then supposedly directly conditioned by this systematic misrepresentation. One of the many surprising M€dhyamika positions is that the ordinary man is himself also fundamentally in the dark about ordinary things, so that instead of M€dhyamika advocating a simple acquiescence in the banal, there are significant discoveries to be undertaken. But

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[5]See p. 99 et sq. and 122 et sq. in Vol. I of T. Tillemans, *Materials for the Study of šryadeva, Dharmap€la and Candrak…rti*. Wiener Studien zur Tibetologie und Buddhismuskunde 24, Vienna 1990.

if there are such discoveries or rediscoveries of the ordinary to be made and if they are liberating, it is difficult to see that a liberation of this sort would involve anything much resembling transcendence, although I would acknowledge that many Buddhists, East and West, would probably disagree here. At any rate, one formulation that I find particularly appealing and which goes a long way in this direction of no-transcendence is what we find in Candrak…rti and in Tsong kha pa: understanding voidness and being liberated is understanding the ordinary, or the so-called "customary truth" (*saˆv•tisatya*), simply as is, stripped of our all-pervasive reifications of intrinsic natures and so forth; it is an understanding of *saˆv• tim€tra*—what is just ordinary, or customary, and no more.[6]

So much for the basic picture of M€dhyamika as I see it. Clearly the key term here is *svabh€va*, intrinsic nature. Broadly speaking, the way the term is generally used, whether in M€dhyamika or in other philosophies, is to signify something or some property which exists objectively and genuinely occurs in, or qualifies, certain things; it is thus to be contrasted with a mind-dependent appearance that is absent from, or fails to correspond to, the thing themselves. Thus, to take the stock Indian example: when a striped rope is seen as a snake, the pseudo-snake that appears has no intrinsic nature and is not present in, or corresponding to, the striped rope. In the M€dhyamika texts we find this fundamental sense expressed in terms of designations and their bases: to say that something has an intrinsic nature, and is not just a mere appearance or a mere designation (*prajñaptim€tra*) due to language and thought, means that it withstands logical analysis and that it is findable or obtainable by reason in the "basis of designation." The pseudo-snake is obviously not findable anywhere in the striped rope—a fact which any worldling can verify—but if we switch to a more sophisticated level, that of ultimate analysis of the mode of being of things, then, according to the M€dhyamika, nothing is fully findable in its bases, and in that sense, nothing has intrinsic nature.

Note that the formulation I have adopted in terms of *x* having a *svabh€va* implying that *x* and its properties are findable when one searches logically, or equivalently, that *x* and its properties have the ability to withstand logical analysis (*rigs pas dpyad bzod pa*), is not literally what occurs in the texts of N€g€rjuna himself. That said, the locution "ability to withstand logical analysis" and variants upon this terminology are prominently used by most major Indian M€dhyamika writers, who say that customary things exist for us only insofar as they are not analyzed (*avic€ratas*), or to take the striking formulation of ®r…gupta and At…•a, they are "satisfying [only] when not analyzed" (*avic€raram€Šiya*).[7] "Findable/ obtainable/ perceptible as existent under analysis" figures in such

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[6] See Candrak…rti's *#adhyamakAvatArabhASya* ad *Madhyamak€vat€ra* VI.28. Translated by Louis de la Vallée Poussin in *Le Muséon,* nouvelle série, 8, Louvain, 1910, p. 304-305.

[7] See e.g., *Prasannapad€* 67.7 (ed. Louis de la Vallée Poussin, Bibliotheca Buddhica IV) : *naitad evaˆ / laukike vyavah€ra ithaMvicArApravRtter avicArataC ca laukikapad€rth€n€m astitv€t.* "No, it's not so, for in the world this type of analysis does not operate with regard to transactional usage, and entities for the world exist [only] from a non-analytic point of view." See also ibid. 71, n. 1a. On the term *avic€raramaŠ…ya* and Jñ€nagarbha's emphasis on no-analysis (*avic€ra*), see p. 42 and 138 in M.D. Eckel, *Jñ€nagarbha on the Two Truths. An Eighth Century Handbook of Madhyamaka Philosophy.* Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1992.

texts as, for example, *Madhyamak€vat€ra* VI. 160 where Candrak…rti discusses the so-called "sevenfold reasoning" (*rnam bdun gyi rigs pa*) and says that when yogins analyze things, the latter are not found (*rnyed pa*) to exist as having any of the seven possible relationships to parts.[8] Thus, it is argued that under analysis wholes are neither identical with nor different from their parts, meaning that when we look for, or analyze, what we take to be the intrinsic nature of something like a cart in terms of possible part-whole relations, we come up empty handed: we don't find (obtain / perceive) any coherent, unassailable, version of what this cart or its cartness could be. And in that sense, we don't find (obtain / perceive) any real thing: the customary cart only exists unanalyzed. In short, these ways of interpreting N€g€rjuna are probably present in one way or another in all the important currents of Indian M€dhyamika philosophy and especially so in the later Indian M€dhyamika works, such as those of Candrak…rti, Jñ€nagarbha, ®r…gupta, ®€ntarak•ita and Kamala•…la. There is a quasi-consensus amongst commentators on this matter of M€dhyamika philosophy being about unfindability under analysis, and I see no reason to deny that, on this very broad characterization at least, they may well have gotten N€g€rjuna pretty much right.

As we shall discuss shortly, Richard Hayes also focused on something like this sense of *svabh€va*, but instead of speaking of it being a type of analytically findable identity or intrinsic nature, he spoke of it as being identity *simpliciter*. Thus, for him this usage of *svabh€va* meant just what something is, its identity, as opposed to what it is not, its difference from other things.[9] This is not far from accurate as an account, but nonetheless lacks a very important feature in M€dhyamika contexts. The term *svabh€va* can indeed mean identity, what something is—as for example in Abhidharma texts or when M€dhyamikas themselves endorse the generally recognized verity that fire has the *svabh€va* of heat—but it is always more than that in the polemical contexts where it is being refuted by the M€dhyamika. In those contexts, it is an identity that withstands analysis, that is hence real and not just customary; it is consistent and does not dissolve into contradictions when subjected to logical analysis. This is why I prefer to speak of this sense of *svabh€va* as an "analytically findable intrinsic nature," or "analytically findable identity," thus bringing out the fact that the M€dhyamika is arguing against *real* identity, what something really is. In their polemical attributions of *svabh€va* to "realists", or advocates of "real entities" (*bh€va*), the M€dhyamikas always take this *svabh€va* as involving a reification, a misguided attempt to confer some sort of an ultimate status to things, a *bh€vasvabh€va.* As I shall try to show below, this idea that realists, and indeed we ourselves, are constantly engaged in reification, i.e., a type of distorting projection, is the thread which ties the would-be double use of the term *svabh€va* together. However, before we get to that, let's very briefly look at the N€g€rjuna's own use of *svabh€va*.

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8 *Madhyamak€vat€ra* VI.160ab: *rnam bdun gyis med gang de ji lta bur / yod ces rnal 'byor pas 'di'i yod mi rnyed .* It is not clear what the Sanskrit corresponding to *rnyed pa* is here, but it is likely to be *labdha,* as it is in VI.23, or possibly *pr€pta/upalabdha.* The basic idea of things being fundamentally unfindable (*na labdha*) is already present in the *Sam€dhir€jas™tra* 32.96: *dharmo na labdho buddhena yasya saˆjñ€ utpadyate* "The Buddha has not found any dharma of which a notion arises."

9 Hayes op. cit. 305, 311.

In Chapter XV of his most important work, the *M™lamadhyamakak€rik€*s, N€g€rjuna develops what seems to be a different use of "intrinsic nature" from that which we have termed "analytically findable identity." In the first two verses he speaks instead of an intrinsic nature as something which "cannot arise due to causes and conditions" (*na sa ˆ bhava f svabh€vasya yukta f pratyayahetubhi f*) and as that which is "not fabricated and is not dependent on anything else" (*ak•trima f svabh€vo hi nirapek•a f paratra ca).*[10] It is this sense that Robinson would take as the point of departure for his critique, arguing that N€g€rjuna foists upon his innocent opponent an acceptance of an absurd and self-contradictory *svabh€va (*After all, would anyone actually acknowledge that things are independent of causes and conditions?) and proceeds to an all-too-easy refutation of his opponent by saying that *this* cannot exist.[11] Equally it is this second sense of *svabh€va* that Hayes would seize upon to show that the M€dhyamika arguments' seeming persuasiveness will evaporate when we diagnose the equivocations between the first and second senses of *svabh€va*. Let us term these two aspects, intrinsic-nature-as-findable-identity and intrinsic-nature-as-independent-existence.[12] As I had mentioned earlier, Hayes spoke of the first sense as identity *simpliciter*, but it's worth our while to stress that what it is actually a type of *analytically findable* identity, or analytically findable intrinsic nature. So I'll deliberately take the liberty of modifying Hayes' formulation a bit and add the qualification of "findability" to identity.

Now, I think that it is quite clear that N€g€rjuna himself made a conscious attempt to fuse these two would-be separate aspects of *svabh€va* in some sort of mutually implicative relationship. In his *M™lamadhyamakak€rik€*s XVIII.10, we find:

> *prat…tya yad bhavati na hi t€vat tad eva tat /*
> na c€nyad api tat tasm€n nocchinna ˆ n€pi •€•vatam //
>
> Whatever *x* exists in dependence [upon *y*], that *x* is not identical to *y*,
> nor is it other than *y*. Therefore it is neither eliminated nor eternal.

The passage is in effect stating that whatever exists dependently— i.e., whatever lacks independent existence—also lacks findable identity, for being a findable identity means, according to N€g€rjuna, that one should be able to say rationally, in a way that stands up to analysis, that a thing is either identifiable with or is something different from the things it depends upon. In short: if *x* and *y* are dependent, they do not have independent existence; if they do not have independent existence, they do not have a findable identity. And if this "if ...then" paraphrase of N€g€rjuna's verse is right, it follows by applications of *modus tollens* that whatever *x* and *y* have findable identity must also have independent existence, and will not be dependent on anything. The route from findability to independence is thus short and sweet: for N€g€rjuna, a findable identity entails independence. If we

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[10] A similar statement t concerning *svabh€va* being independent is also to be found in Candrak…rti's *˜…k€* to verse 288 of the twelfth chapter of šryadeva's *CatuHCataka::* *tatrAtmA n€ma bh€v€n€ˆ yo 'par€yattasvar™pasvabh€va f* "There, what is called *€tman* ("self", "identity"), is entities' intrinsic nature (*svabh€va*), the essence (*svar™pa)* that does not depend on anything else." See Tillemans *Materials,* op. cit. p. 126.
[11] See Robinson op. cit. 326.
[12] Hayes's terms are respectively *svabh€va*1 "identity" and *svabh€va*2 "causal independence." Hayes op cit. 312.

add the term "intrinsic nature," it looks like the following entailment holds for N€g€rjuna: intrinsic-nature-as-findable-entity entails intrinsic-nature-as-independent-existence.

There is another famous passages in the *M™lamadhyamakak€rik€s* that rather clearly supports our contention that N€g€rjuna himself saw a link between findability and independence and thus between the two aspects of the semantic range of the supposedly equivocal term, *svabh€va.* This is the extremely well known verse, XXIV.18, which makes a series of equivalences or mutual implications, including one between being dependent and being something just simply designated by the mind on the basis of other things, especially its parts:

yaf prat…tyasamutp€daf •™nyat€ˆ t€ˆ pracak•mahe /

s€ prajñaptir up€d€ya pratipat saiva madhyam€ //

"Dependent arising, that we declare to be voidness. This [voidness] is [equivalent to] being a designation in dependence. And it [i.e., voidness] is precisely the middle way."

Without going into a detailed exegesis of this rich and complex verse, we can fairly readily see that an attempt is once again being made to connect the concepts of dependence and unfindability, or equally, findability and independence. Being a designation in dependence upon something else has to be understood as being just a designation by thought and language and no more (*prajñaptim€tra*): the thing in question cannot be found if we subject it to analysis. What is dependent, then, is unfindable under analysis. Note that characterizing all things as dependently arising and as being mere designations also highlights the primordial role of the cognizing mind that is responsible for something being such and such: these "designations" are "mere designations" in that they are mentally created without being somehow "out there" in the object.

We'll come back to the type of argumentation strategies used by N€g€rjuna, but in any case, I think we already should have an inkling that a relatively natural reading of N€g€rjuna is to take him as accepting a very close link between the two aspects of *svabh€va*. In fact, I strongly suspect that the link is not just a conditional in one direction, but is rather a biconditional, i.e., *x* has independent existence *if and only if x* is analytically findable. Besides findability under analysis implying independence, it looks to me that N€g€rjuna would also accept the converse, i.e., that if something were to be of a genuinely independent intrinsic nature (viz., independent of causes, parts, and even the minds that designate it), it would have to be somehow findable under analysis— for example, as something completely distinct from parts or from any kind of causal history, and present in an object independently of the mental processes of designation. It would be a genuine absolute completely other than the relative. The candidates for this sort of absolute would be things like *nirv€Ša* or the "unconditioned" (*asaˆsk•ta*), and it is not surprising that N€g€rjuna subjects them to a trenchant critique of unfindability under analysis. In short, it looks like, for N€g€rjuna at least, findability under analysis and independence are two equivalent, mutually implicative, notions. If we say that sometimes the use of the term *svabh€va* seems to highlight one aspect and sometimes the other, that does not mean that term *svabh€va* is thereby equivocal: we may well have two ways to unpack one and the same concept. If that is right, then the minimum result of our discussion up to

this point is that it should begin to look rather doubtful that N€g€rjuna is guilty of the gross equivocation of which he is accused by Hayes. He may perhaps have been wrong, he may have even done something which we cannot easily follow, but he didn't just simply play on two different senses.

II

A few words about Robinson's paper and the charge that the M€dhyamika pursued a sophistical strategy of misrepresenting his opponents as accepting an absurd and contradictory notion of *svabh€va*. Robinson had argued:

> "The validity of N€g€rjuna's refutations hinges upon whether his opponents really upheld the existence of a *svabh€va* or *svabh€va* as he defines the term." [13]

He then proceeded to survey the various opponents' positions to see whether "N€g€rjuna succeed[s] in refuting all views without making any assumptions that are not conceded by the adherents of the particular view under attack."[14] I won't evaluate the actual list of "axioms" that Robinson attributes to the M€dhyamika himself and their non-acceptance by the M€dhyamika's opponents, as fortunately we need not enter into the details of this rather complicated picture. I would maintain that the accuracy of those details is in any case a secondary debate—what is significant for us here is Robinson's general line of argument that the M€dhyamika philosopher is just practicing sleight of hand *because* he attributes to his opponents things they do not accept.

Now, I think we would have to say that it would be quite unfair to accuse N€g€rjuna of deliberate misrepresentation *simply* because he attributed to his opponent things that the same opponent would reject, even vociferously. Certainly if an opponent didn't recognize something attributed to him, that in itself would not necessarily mean that he was misrepresented, for it is a natural and even inevitable part of many genuinely philosophical debates between truth-seekers, that at some point one group says what the other actually thinks, or what they must think if they are to remain consistent with their own basic principles. Of course, there are good and bad, fair and unfair, ways to do this, but the simple fact of one party adopting such a move in a debate does not in itself mean that it is misrepresenting the other or playing, what Robinson calls, a type of sophistical "shell game."

The issue can be reformulated: Is the M€dhyamika then himself being fair to his opponent, and (often or mostly) doing truth-seeking philosophy, or is he just playing at disingenuous and sophistical shell games? I think the texts would tend to back mostly the former view, even if the dichotomy is a little simplistic and the line that we want to draw between truth-seeking and sophistry is often shaded. In any case, M€dhyamikas, or at least many M€dhyamikas, were quite aware that misrepresentation was a charge *they* had to answer, and they tried to answer it (as far I can see) with

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[13] Robinson op. cit. 326.

[14] Ibid. 327.

sincerity. Of course, it might be that they were in the long run unsatisfying in their answers, but it's very hard to agree that they were just performing a *trompe l'oeil* or deliberately setting up their opponent with facile self-contradictions. For example, the eighth century Indian writer, Kamala•...la, in his *Madhyamak€loka*, was confronted with the objection that his opponents would not themselves acknowledge the logical reasons which the M€dhyamika was using, and that therefore the reasons would be "unestablished" (*asiddhahetu*). He replied with rather detailed arguments showing that his adversaries *would have to accept* the reason, inspite of their vociferous denials, because it was entailed by other propositions that they did explicitly accept. The tactic of argumentation is clear and figures repeatedly in the discussion of the "neither one nor many" argument (*ek€nekaviyogahetu*) in the *Madhyamak€loka*, from folio 215b to 218a in the *sDe dge* edition (henceforth "D.").[15] Indeed, Kamala ...la systematically takes up the objections of numerous sorts of Buddhist and non-Buddhists who argue that they have been misrepresented by the M€dhyamika who alleges that things *they* accept (i.e., God, atoms, space, consciousness, etc.) are neither single entities nor several different entities (and are hence unreal). Kamala•...la's reply is always the same: the adversary accepts by implication , or has in fact accepted (*shugs kyis na khas blangs pa nyid; khas blangs pa kho na*), that the pseudo-entity to which he subscribes is neither one thing nor many different things, because he accepts such and such a property of this entity, and that property in fact implies being neither one nor many. The key Tibetan term *shugs kyis na* that is used here probably translated a Sanskrit original term along the lines of *s€m€rthy€t*, "indirectly," "by implication." One example passage from *Madhyamak€loka* should suffice to show how such "acceptance by implication" works:

> *gang dag gis lus la sogs pa rdul phran bsags pa tsam yin pa'i phyir rdul phra rab rnams so so re re gcig pa nyid du kun brtags pa de dag gis kyang sbyor ba dang bsags pa sogs pa'i chos su khas blangs pa'i phyir shugs kyis na gcig pa nyid dang bral pa nyid kyang khas blangs pa kho na yin te /*
>
> "Those who imagine that each atom individually is one thing since the body and other such [gross objects] are just simply collections of atoms, do in fact also accept by implication that [the atoms] lack oneness, for they accept that [the atoms] have properties (*chos*) such as being junctions or collections [of parts]."[16]

Nor should it be thought that this use of "acceptance by implication," or perhaps more simply "implicit acceptance," was an occasional flash in the pan of one Indian thinker—it looks to me to be a more or less basic Indo-Tibetan M€dhyamika argument strategy. In Tibet, the same basic general method of attributing positions by implication was often known as presenting what the "opponent's position ends up being" (*khas len pa'i mthar thug pa*), or less literally, "the upshot" of his views. One also finds in certain texts the related notion *rigs pas 'phul ba,* "imposing [a principle] through logical reasoning" or *'phul mtshams kyi rigs pa*, literally translated as a "logical reasoning which imposes a limit". Interestingly enough, although the term *'phul mtshams* is not, to my knowledge, found in any dictionary, including the three volume *Tibetan-Tibetan-Chinese Dictionary*, or *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*, and is a bit difficult for me to translate satisfactorily, a quick

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[15] = *Peking* edition f. 238b-241a.

[16] *sDe dge* edition folio 216a-b.

search of the *Asian Classics Input Project* data base of Tibetan collected works (*gsung 'bum*), reveals that *'phul mtshams* occurs eighty-two times— if we were to add the variants like *rigs pas 'phul, 'phul nus pa'i rigs pa*, etc., we would be into hundreds of occurrences, largely in later commentaries, but also occasionally in Tsong kha pa's works, like his *dBu ma dgongs pa rab gsal* on Candrak…rti's *Madhyamak€vat€ra*. It seems to have escaped lexicographers, and so it escaped western researchers on M€dhyamika too. That said, I have the impression that it was, and still is, more or less common knowledge amongst monks. Indeed, this technique of logically imposing principles upon recalcitrant opponents was, according to the late dGe bshes rTa mgrin Rab brtan, essential in actual dGe lugs pa monastic debates on M€dhyamika and was typically used when someone wanted to show that having an intrinsic nature, or equivalently "being truly established" (*bden par grub pa*), or being truly established as such and such a thing, would imply its being such and such in "complete independence from everything whatsoever" (*gang la'ang bltos med*).[17] In fact, this implication of complete independence from causes, parts and also from the cognizing mind, is amply attested in the texts and is not just an oral tradition. It figures, for example, in an extract from Sera Chos kyi rgyal mtshan's *sKabs dang po'i spyi don* that I translated a number of years ago.[18] I think the implication in question is a compactly formulated version of the principle that we were stressing earlier in looking at the two verses from N€g€rjuna, viz. that findability under analysis, or findable identity, implies complete independence. What is noteworthy in the present context is that this implication, according to experienced debaters like dGe bshes Rab brtan, is known as a case of *rigs pas 'phul ba*. Of course, it would supposedly hold whether the opponent liked it or not—his protests would just be grounds for more debate, a debate which could, nevertheless, be quite sincere and truth-seeking.

III

Let us now take up anew the problem of the link between findability and independence. While it should be clear that the M€dhyamika, with his strategy of implications, upshots and imposed principles, is probably a much more sophisticated and interesting philosopher than Robinson and Hayes made him out to be, his use of these implications between findable identity and independence is a particularly important step and is a hard one to fathom. Perhaps at some point much further down the road we might come to the conclusion that we should give up on it all and go back to detecting misrepresentations, equivocation and other forms of sloppy thinking. But I think that Robinson and Hayes were far too quick in taking that step. So, how does the link work? If we grant, as I think we should, that M€dhyamikas were not cunningly equivocating on *svabh€va* and misrepresenting their

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[17] I had the privilege of being dGe bshes rTa mgrin Rab brtan's student for a number of years in the 1970's and early 80's and often had arguments with him where I presented my own Robinson-like objections.

[18] T. Tillemans, "Two Tibetan Texts on the 'Neither One Nor Many' Argument for *CUnyatA*," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 12, 1984: 357-388. See especially p. 364 (text f. 26a6) : *khyab ste / bden grub kyi gcig yin na gang la'ang bltos med kyi gcig yin dgos / de yin na cha bcas ma yin dgos pa'i phyir /* "The entailment holds because if anything were to be truly one, it would have to be one [thing] which does not depend on anything [else] whatsoever, and in such a case it could not have parts."

opponents, then how did *they* think that the seeming gap between findability and independence should be bridged?

There is unfortunately no quick answer. To arrive at a charitable interpretation of M€dhyamika thought that would start to answer that question, we need to be clearer on how the mass of seemingly diverse arguments in M€dhyamika might work together. I can see at least three types of argument strategies that are relevant to us in this context, all three present in varying degrees in M€dhyamika texts, although for the purposes of this lecture I'll have to be brief and concentrate on broad outlines rather than on the detailed exegesis of specific textual passages. Here are the three:

a. a selective use of pan-Indian philosophical debates
b. etymological and purely semantic arguments
c. non-obvious facts about our mental-makeup and way of seeing the world.

We first turn to what I am calling "the selective use of pan-Indian debates." A good example of this is to found in Dharmap€la's commentary on šryadeva's Catu*ƒ•ataka,* where this 6th century Vijñ€nav€da commentator on M€dhyamika examines the possibility of vision and other sensory experiences, and embarks on a detailed analysis whether or not the subtle matter of the eye has contact with its object.[19] The problem thus is whether or not the senses act at a distance. This is a bona fide pan-Indian debate, known as the problem of *pr€pyak€ritvav€da* ("action by contact") and *apr€pyak€ritvav€da* ("action without contact"), and interestingly enough, Dharmap€la accepts the critique of each side against the other.[20] This acceptance of the absurdities raised by both sides means that the M€dhyamika can then move to the desired conclusion that all possibilities of genuine vision are riddled with faults, and that it is hence impossible that people do really see anything. For Dharmap€la, šryadeva's end was best served by showing that both sides of the debate were untenable—the two adversaries' refutations were both accepted, with the result that the matter in question was shown to be without intrinsic nature, that is, inconsistent and unable to resist a thorough examination, and hence unfindable under analysis.

We see a similar strategy at work in the M€dhyamika arguments on causality, e.g., whether effects and causes are essentially identical or different. Causality was regularly examined in terms of two alternatives, *satk€ryav€da* and *asatk€ryav€da,* or the "theory of the effect existing or not existing [at the time of the cause]"—predictably N€g€rjuna's conclusion is that neither alternative is possible.[21] We also see this use of pan-Indian themes in N€g€rjuna's use of the recurring

[19] See pp. 156 –159 and n. 290, 299 in Vol. I of T. Tillemans, *Materials for the Study of šryadeva, Dharmap€la and Candrak…rti*.

[20] On the general outlines of this debate in Indian philosophy, see chapter XVIII in S. Mookherjee, *The Buddhist Philosophy of Universal Flux*, Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 1980.

[21] There are several arguments involved here involving fairly clearly discernible pan-Indian controversies invoking widely accepted principles, often from grammatical analysis. For example, my colleague, Johannes Bronkhorst, has traced how N€g€rjuna used a certain pan-Indian preoccupation concerning the correspondence between words and things to argue that statements like "X causes Y" or "X makes Y" cannot resist analysis, because the effect Y does not yet exist at the time of X. See J. Bronkhorst, *Langage et réalité. Sur un épisode de la pensée indienne*. Brépols Publishers, Turnhout, Belgium, 1999.

controversy on parts (*avayava*) and wholes (*avayavin*), i.e., whether parts are identical to or different from wholes, or whether wholes are somehow more or less real than parts. Here too the conclusion is that none of the alternatives are satisfactory, and yet if something genuinely had intrinsic nature it would have to fit in with one of the two possible positions. The conclusion is immediate: no intrinsic nature.

What is noteworthy for us is that this peculiar type of acceptance of both sides' refutations in pan-Indian controversies *does* make for a bridge between intrinsic-nature-as-independent-existence and intrinsic-nature-as-findable-identity. In *M™lamadhyamakak€rik€s* XVIII.10, cited above, we saw that when *x* was dependent on *y*, the two were neither genuinely identical nor different; at least following Candrak…rti's interpretation in *Prasannapad€,* the argument turns on the *satk€ryav€da-asatk€ryav€da* debate: the cause would be neither the same nor different from the effect. *M™lamadhyamakak€rik€s* XXIV.18, it will be recalled, made a linkage between being dependent and being a mere designation (*prajñaptim€tra*), that is to say, between dependence and being unanalyzable, unfindable. Here Candrak…rti explicitly glosses the verse in terms of the problem of parts and wholes—everything has parts and is dependent upon parts, but cannot be found as the same or different from the parts.

Whether it is causality or part-whole problems that are at stake, the M€dhyamika very often relies upon the same type of argumentation strategy: use one side of a pan-Indian debate off against the other to show that dependence will imply not being findable, and thus show that findability entails independence. If things were dependent *and* findable under analysis, then the cause and effect relationship would be either along the lines of *satk€ryav€da* or *asatk€ryav€da*, but it is neither of the two; therefore things cannot be both dependent and findable. Similarly for parts and wholes: if things were dependent and findable, then they would be identical or different from their parts; but they are neither; therefore they are not both dependent and findable. The linkage between dependence and being unfindable is thus made by means of an implicit three step argument:

1. For things to be both dependent and findable under analysis would imply a solution to major pan-Indian debates such as those concerning part and wholes and causality.
2. These debates have no such solution.
3. Ergo dependence and findability are incompatible and cannot both be asserted.

In sum, if things are dependent, they cannot be findable under analysis; their findability entails their independence from causes, parts and all other factors.

The second approach, i.e., etymologies and semantics, is what one finds in *M™lamadhyamakak€rik€*s' chapter XV on *svabh€va*, and especially in Candrak…rti's exegesis upon this chapter in *Prasannapad€.* It is the type of argumentation where the M€dhyamika says that that if something has *svabh€va*, the word *svabh€va* is to be analyzed as meaning that the thing has its own being, i.e., *svo bh€va*. Equally, in the world, to say that a property is the *svabh€va* of something is to say that it is "natural," "innate," "intrinsic," and is not "fabricated" by extraneous causal facts, just like heat is said by the world to be an intrinsic nature of fire but not of water (because when we boil

water, the heat has to be brought in "from the outside").While an adequate treatment of the use of semantic arguments in M€dhyamika texts would take us much too far afield here, for our purposes now we can probably skirt the detailed textual exegesis. What is to be stressed is that the semantic approach in arguments like the one about fire, water and heat is probably best viewed as providing no more than approximate illustrations and analogies, but not rigorous probative demonstrations about *svabh€va*'s complete independence. Indeed Candrak…rti himself, in the *Prasannapad€,* goes on to stress that actually the heat, because it *is* causally dependent, does *not* have intrinsic nature for the M€dhyamika at all, and he thereby acknowledges rather clearly the approximate and merely illustrative aspect to his discussion about fire, water and heat.[22] Not only that, but in stressing the limits of the fire-heat case, he suggests that what constitutes the intrinsic nature that he and other M€dhyamikas are refuting is not just the worldly conception of a natural, innate, or intrinsic property like fire's heat, but something more subtle and radical, in that it involves *complete* independence. It may be approximately illustrated by reference to the ordinary worldly notion of nature with its partial independence from certain types of (extraneous) causes, but it is not the same as that notion because it goes much further in its independence. Similarly for the etymological argument about *svo bh€va,* which immediately precedes the fire-water-heat analogy: this too is explicitly recognized by Candrak…rti to be showing how "it is established, for the world, that intrinsic nature is not a fabricated entity."[23] It is at most indirectly illustrating the type of *svabh€va* which the M€dhyamika is attacking. But once again, that latter *svabh€va* is something rather special and is not simply identifiable with the ordinary notion of intrinsic nature with which the world is familiar.[24]

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[22] See *Prasannapad€* 260.9-10: *tad evam akRtakaH svabh€va iti lokavyavah€re vyavasthite vayam id€n… ˆ br™mo yad etad auSNya ˆ tad apy agne f svabh€vo na bhavat…ti gRhyatA ˆ kRtakatvAt* / "So, thus, when in the world's transactional usage it is established that intrinsic nature is what is not fabricated, we now assert that it should be understood that heat is not the intrinsic nature of fire either, for it is produced [from causes and conditions]." Cf. also the discussion of this and other uses of *svabh€va* in Chapter XV developed by J.W. de Jong, "Le problème de l'absolu dans l'école m€dhyamika," *Revue philosophique* 140, 1950: 322-327.; "The Problem of the Absolute in the Madhyamaka School," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 2, 1972: 1-6.

[23] *Prasannapad€* 260.5: *k takaf pad€rthaf sa loke naiva svabh€va iti vyapadiCyate* .

[24] It is also worth noting that what the M€dhyamika is arguing against is *not* simply the notion of an "intrinsic property" as it figures in certain articles in contemporary western analytic philosophy. Compare Stephan Yablo's intuitive characterization: "You know what an intrinsic property is: it's a property that a thing has (or lacks) regardless of what may be going on outside of itself"' (p. 479 in S. Yablo, "Intrinsicness," *Philosophical Topics* 26, 1999, 479-505). Cf. also I. L. Humberstone, "Intrinsic/Extrinsic," *Synthèse* 108, 1996: 205-267. See the summary of these views in B. Weatherson, "Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic Properties," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/intrinsic-extrinsic, 2002. One of the ways of distinguishing intrinsic and extrinsic, i.e., that of Brian Ellis (Humberstone, 206), is suggestive of Candrak…rti's fire-heat-water case: intrinsic properties are those which an object has independently of any outside forces acting on them and extrinsic are those the object has because of outside forces. Cf. also J. Michael Dunn, "Relevant Predication 2: Intrinsic Properties and Internal Relations," *Philosophical Studies* 60, 1990: 177-206. On page 178 Dunn writes: "Metaphysically, an intrinsic property of an object is a property that the object has by virtue of itself, depending on no other thing." In any case, it should be clear that when *these* authors are speaking of no dependence on outside forces, other things, etc., they are *not* saying that an intrinsic property (e.g., an object's mass or atomic composition) is completely independent of any and all factors, like its own causes that brought it into being, its parts, etc., etc.

Finally, the third strategy, viz., invoking non-obvious facts about our mental make-up and way of conceiving the world, is arguably what pins down better the interpretation of the first two as involving a subtle sense of intrinsic nature. An extremely important feature of M€dhyamika philosophy is that it depends heavily on the idea of the M€dhyamika refuting our "superimpositions" (*sam€ropa*), i.e., our inveterate tendencies to distort the world by systematically imposing upon it "intrinsic natures." *Svabh€va* is thus a false projection upon otherwise innocuous objects of our customary world that do not have such *svabh€va*, and the task of the M€dhyamika is to refute these projections, but not the customary world itself. This key emphasis on distinguishing subtle "superimpositions" (*sam€ropa)* of intrinsic nature from the otherwise innocuous customary world of ordinary objects is to be found in texts of Candrak…rti, Jñ€nagarbha, Kamala …la, and many others, and perhaps even in those of N€g€rjuna himself, at least if we believe the commentators. To take a passage from Jñ€nagarbha's *Satyadvayavibha‰gav•tti* (D. 12a-b)*:*

> *gzugs la sogs pa'i lus rtog pa'i nyes pas ma sbags pa gzhan gyi dbang gi bdag nyid rnam par shes pa tsam snang ba dgag par mi nus pa 'ba' zhig tu ma zad kyi / byed na byed pa po la mngon sum la sogs pas phyir gnod pa kho na byed do //*

> "We cannot negate physical things, such as visible matter and the like, which are untainted by conceptualization's corruptions, are of a dependent nature, and which are appearances to simple [non-conceptual] cognition. Not only is this impossible, but if we did [negate such things] then the person who performed [this negation] would in fact be subsequently refuted by direct perception (*pratyak•a*) and other [valid cognitions]."

Compare Kamala•…la in the *Madhyamak€loka* (D. 180a):

> *des na dngos po rnams kyi ngo bo nyid kun rdzob pa la yang gnod pa ni mi byed kyi / 'on kyang de la bden pa'i rnam pa nyid du sgro btags pa sel ba'i phyir rab tu sgrub par byed pa kho na yin no //*

> "We do not invalidate the customary natures of entities, but instead just prove [the absence of real intrinsic nature] in order to exclude what is superimposed upon the [customary entities] as their aspect of being true (*bden pa'i rnam pa*)."

Finally, Candrak…rti also stressed that there had to be an all-important distinction between things and the "intrinsic nature" (*svar™pa = svabh€va*), of things. *Prasannapad€* 58.10-11:

> tasm€d anutpann€ bh€v€ ity eva ˆ t€vad vipar…tasvar™p€dhy€ropa-pratipak•eŠa prathamaprakaraŠ€rambhaƒ / id€n… ˆ kvacid yaƒ ka•cid vi•e•o 'dhy€ropitas tadvi•e•€p€karaŠ€rtha ˆ •e•aprakaraŠ€rambhaƒ / gant•gantavyagaman€diko 'pi nirava•e•o vi•e•o n€sti prat…tyasamutp€dasyeti pratip€dan€rtham //.

> "Thus, when [N€g€rjuna] says 'entities do not arise' in this way first of all [it is pointed out that] the initial chapter [of the *M™lamadhyamakak€rik€*s] was written as a counter to superimpositions of false intrinsic natures; and then that the remaining chapters were written in order to eliminate whatever distinctions are superimposed anywhere; the [passage] is designed to show that dependent arising has absolutely no distinctions at all like goers, places to be gone over and going, etc."

Some remarks. First, all three authors regularly speak in one way or another of superimpositions, be they superimposed intrinsic natures (*svabh€va, svar™pa*), distinctions (*vi•e•a*), aspects (*€k€ra*)—the differences are essentially those of wording. That said, Kamala•…la's words, "what is superimposed upon the [customary entities] as their aspect of being true (*bden pa'i rnam pa*)," take on special significance because they show that this superimposition is a *reification*, a way of taking the ordinary as being much more real, consistent, and resistant to analysis than it is. Second, in a recent article, "On *sam€ropa*", Teruyoshi Tanji says quite rightly about the passage cited from *Prasannapad€*:

> "... Candrak…rti asserts that, strictly speaking, the effect of *sam€ropa* is not a thing but the own-being [i.e., intrinsic nature] of a thing, as he observes that ... [*tasm€d anutpann€ bh€v€ ity* ... *pratip€dan€rtham*]. This observation [i.e., the passage in *Prasannapad€* 58.10-11], being the summary of the subjects of the chapters in the MMK [i.e., *M™lamadhyamakak€rik€s*], expresses aptly the core of Candrak…rti's philosophy of emptiness. It is so important and cardinal that the meaning of all the other statements in his commentary ought to be estimated by way of meeting the view of this observation."[25]

I agree fully. In brief: at least for Jñ€nagarbha, Kamala …la and Candrak…rti, refuting superimpositions (i.e., reifications of things rather than customary things themselves) is what M€dhyamika thought is essentially about.[26] M€dhyamikas would thus refute superimposed versions of causes, parts, wholes, people, things, what have you, but not the causes, parts, wholes, etc., themselves upon which the superimpositions are made. It is here, in the reliance upon the contrast between superimpositions and the ordinary that we see clearly that the *svabh€va* which the M€dhyamika is refuting is not just an ordinary and familiar property or nature like heat, impermanence, being blue, etc.— it can and should be distinguished (albeit with difficulty) from ordinary things. The result, however, of it not being identifiable with ordinary things is that it is non-obvious as to what it is.

In fact, while it seems clear that we must see Candrak…rti, Kamala …la and other commentators as recommending an interpretation of N€g€rjuna as refuting superimpositions, it is considerably less clear if N€g€rjuna himself is to be read that way. It could be argued that his reasoning doesn't have anything to do with superimpositions at all and simply targets the ordinary things themselves, showing that, if analyzed, the latter are seen to just exist erroneously and only for benighted worldlings. This is certainly a way in which people (e.g., those of a Jo nang pa inspiration) have taken M€dhyamika

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[25] P. 353 in T. Tanji, "On *sam€ropa*. Probing the Relationship of the Buddha's Silence and His Teaching," in J. Silk (ed.) *Wisdom, Compassion, and the Search for Understanding.* The Buddhist Studies Legacy of Gadjin M. Nagao. Honolulu, University of Hawai'i Press, 2000. See also our remarks on Tanji's article in our review in *The Eastern Buddhist* 33, 1, 2001: 181-185.

[26] One way to arrive at a more or less similar interpretation of N€g€rjuna as refuting superimposed reifications is to say that the M€dhyamika tetralemma (*catuSkoTi*) is refuting propositions implicitly or explicitly qualified by an operator "ultimately", but is not attacking unqualified propositions. Thus, e.g., N€g€rjuna would be refuting "Ultimately, such and such is the case", but not the simple statement "Such and such is the case." See p. in T. Tillemans, *Scripture, Logic and Language: Essays on Dharmak…rti and his Tibetan Successors.* Studies in Indian and Tibetan Buddhism 1, Wisdom Press, Boston 1999. Cf. Claus Oetke, "Remarks on the Interpretation of N€g€rjuna's Philosophy," *Journal of Indian Philosophy* 19, 1991: 315-323, where we are advised (p. 318) to interpret N€g€rjuna's refutations as of the form "On the highest level of truth, it is not so that there are *x* such that *x* is such and such."

thought, viz., that the point of this philosophy is to show that customary things themselves are just "void of themselves" (*rang stong*) and only "exist from the perspective of mistaken consciousness" (*rnam shes 'khrul ba'i ngor yod pa*);[27] it also finds a type of confirmation in the recurrent Buddhist image of the customary world being just like the hairs and other such hallucinations that appear to people suffering from opthalmia (*timira)*. I won't delve into the problem of how to eliminate this way of reading N€g€rjuna, if indeed it can be eliminated at all. I personally am increasingly skeptical about current attempts to say in meaningful philosophical terms what N€g€rjuna *himself* really meant apart from how he was interpreted: at the end of the day we may well come to Paul Griffiths' conclusion that N€g€rjuna's texts, by themselves, straight without a commentarial chaser, may be simply too indeterminate to answer philosophers' questions about their precise meaning.[28] In any case, all I wish to claim is that historically the way of reading N€g€rjuna's philosophy as a refutation of superimpositions was very well attested and was explicitly promoted by major commentators of India, be they of the so-called Sv€tantrika school or of the Pr€sa‰gika school. That will have to suffice for us here.

Now, if we adopt the commentarial approach and methodology of Candrak…rti, Kamala …la, Jñ€nagarbha *et alii* on which we have been insisting, the use of semantical arguments, etymologies and pan-Indian debates will have to be interpreted accordingly. Candrak…rti, as we saw above, was especially clear in his exegesis of N€g€rjuna: the myriad of arguments in the *M™lamadhyamak€rik€s* which focused on the basis schemata of Indian thought were exclusively refuting superimpositions. The M€dhyamikas, thus, were not using these pan-Indian arguments against ordinary entities tables, such as chairs, vases, etc., nor even our ordinary notion of natures, intrinsic properties, etc. (notions which the worldling does undoubtedly have and use),[29] but rather against a peculiar reified version of intrinsic nature, i.e., one which at most exhibits analogies to the ordinary. In that case, the pan-Indian arguments about parts, wholes, causes, perception, etc., etc., are not being used to undermine the purely ordinary notions of parts, wholes, etc., but rather superimpositions, or perhaps more exactly, the notions of parts, wholes, etc. as corrupted by a subtle, erroneous, superimposition which is

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[27] See, e.g., a modern Jo nang pa textbook, the *rGyu 'bras theg pa mchog gi gnas lugs zab mo'i don rnam par nges pa rje Jo nang pa chen po'i ring lugs 'jigs med med gdong lnga'i nga ro* of Yon tan bzang po, published by Mi rigs dpe skrung khang, Beijing, . In the section on the two truths (p. 116) we find statements like:

> *de ltar gyi kun rdzob bden pa / chos can / khyod don dam bden pa ma yin te / khyod gshis kyi gnas lugs su ye shes dam pa'i spyod yul du mi bden pa'i phyir / der thal / khyod kyi rang bzhin na rnam shes 'khrul ngo tsam du zad pa gang zhig / 'phags pa mchog gi ye shes kyi gzigs ngor rnam yang ma grub pa'i phyir / kun brdzob bden pa yin na rnam shes 'khrul ngo tsam du zad pas khyab ste ...*

"Take such customary truth as the topic: it is not ultimate truth, because it is not true as an object of the highest wisdom about the absolute. This follows because in its nature it is nothing more than a mere perspective of mistaken consciousness and is never established from the perspective of the noble, supreme wisdom. If something is a customary truth, this implies that it is nothing more than a mere perspective of mistaken consciousness."

[28] P. Griffiths, Review of D. Burton, *Emptiness Appraised. Journal of Buddhist Ethics* 7, 2000 (http://jbe.gold.ac.uk/): 22-25. See p. 24: "The first difficulty is one endemic to all scholarship on N€g€rjuna. It is that N€g€rjuna's works are, in this reviewer's judgment, insufficiently precise and systematic to make debates about what he really meant, philosophically speaking, very useful."

[29] See n. 22 above .

responsible for them being reified. It is with regard to that rather specific subject matter, that both sides of the pan-Indian debates, for the M€dhyamika, have no solution.

What then of the link between findability and independence? The first problem would be exegetical: to look at some of the passages that Hayes discussed and try to see whether N€g€rjuna's arguments could work better and make better sense once we saw them as directed against a rather special target of things corrupted by superimpositions. I think they do make better sense, in that the equivocations and non-sequiturs which Hayes diagnosed with regard to verses like *M™lamadhyamakak€rik€*s I.5 disappear rather well when we see *svabh€va* as always involving *both* analytically findable identity and independence. Similarly for the other verses that troubled Hayes. True, the verses highlight, at one time or another, one of the aspects of *svabh€va*, but the other aspect is always implicitly present. And if that's so, then the complicated analysis that Hayes gives us is largely unnecessary and moot. Indeed, instead of hastening towards a reading discerning equivocations, we might well want to adopt what Paul Grice once termed the "Modified Occam's Razor": senses are not to be multiplied beyond necessity.[30] It looks like there is no need to do what Hayes did with N€g€rjuna and thus I think we had better not do it.

I could imagine a defender of Hayes's approach saying the following: if we avoid the charge of equivocation by making *svabh€va* non-obvious in this way, we may have temporarily sheltered N€g€rjuna and co. from being charged with sleight of hand, but at the price of fuzz and obscurantism. Why should we believe that people see the world through these mysterious types of superimpositions of *svabh€va*? A quick and somewhat cavalier reply: I'm not sure that I can or need to show that people do in fact see the world in this way; my rather longish argument so far has not been that the M€dhyamika philosopher is *right*, but rather that he is not tricky, sloppy, equivocal or amateurish. Now, if one *also* wanted to argue that people *do* make the superimpositions that the M€dhyamika says they do, then unfortunately the Indian M€dhyamika literature would offer very little evidence, apart from a number of quotations from scriptures and a lot of doctrinal talk about people being ignorant, under the influence of karma, etc. And this type of religious "evidence" would of course not be persuasive to anyone other than an already convinced Mah€y€na Buddhist. Indeed it looks like the type of evidence that we would need would be some type of psychological, or phenomenological, analysis of how people perceive and think of objects, so that the Indian M€dhyamika reasonings would have to be supplemented with another, and quite different, sort of analysis, namely, introspection and thought-experiments, perhaps a type of phenomenological analysis of our *Lebenswelt.*

To my knowledge, the only M€dhyamikas who explicitly discuss these kinds of thought-experiments are the Tibetans in the dGe lugs pa school. Some of their experiments and phenomenological investigations are indeed fascinating in that they provide a set of M€dhyamika

[30] See p. 47 in P. Grice, *Studies in the Way of Words.* Harvard University Press, 1991.

meditations which are said to be necessary preliminaries to the use of N€g€rjunian logical reasoning.[31] They are designed to make it vivid that in our way of conceiving of things and persons we take them as being something analytically findable and isolated from their complex background of relations so that they stand out as if something independent of everything else, independent of their relations to the mind, independent of their causal history, of parts, etc.—entities seem to have objective status completely independent of our thinking, the causal chain seems to us to be one thing, the entity itself at the end of the chain another, parts are apprehended as separate from the whole and persons are apprehended as separate entities from the bodies, ideas, impressions, feelings, etc., which constitute their component factors. In general, this independence seems to be fundamental to our apprehension of a thing, whatever it may be, and yet reflection would show that there is something fundamentally wrong here, if things are what they are only because of minds and a myriad of factors, dependencies and relations. This process of recognizing where we go wrong comes to be known in dGe lugs pa M€dhyamika thought as *dgag bya ngos 'dzin*, "recognizing that which is to be denied." Obviously this is a considerable step beyond (or perhaps away from) the Indian texts. Although arguably the notion of the "object to be refuted" (*dgag bya*) looks like what the Indian M€dhyamika is calling "superimpositions of *svabh€va*," there are no exercises or preliminary procedures in the Indian texts to lead us to this recognition or to persuade us that we make the superimpositions we do.[32]

IV

What might have laid at the root of Robinson's and Hayes' treatment of the M€dhyamika? I suspect that their point of departure was their sincere puzzlement as to why anyone intelligent would ever want to subscribe to a N€g€rjunian type of *svabh€va,* once it was brought out clearly and starkly

[31] One such thought-experiment is to imagine a tempting trade-off of one's own old and decrepit psycho-physical components for those of the youthful, omniscient, bodhisattva, Mañju•r…. At that point, the "exchanger" (*brje pa po*), i.e., the self whom we feel would benefit from this deal, appears as if it were separate and independent from its components. For Buddhists, such a separate "self" is of course an illusion , but it stands out vividly when "just like a merchant seeking [potential] profit, [the old person] would sincerely grasp at making an exchange." See p. 36 in T. Tillemans, *Persons of Authority*. Tibetan and Indo-Tibetan Studies 5, Franz Steiner Verlag, Stuttgart, 1993.

[32] Note that the fact that commentarial evidence suggests that we should see M€dhyamika philosophy as a refutation of superimpositions is at most a partial vindication of the dGe lugs pa M€dhyamika philosophy about the necessity to recognize the object to be refuted (*dgag bya'i ngos 'dzin*). In fact, the similarity with Tsong kha pa and the dGe lugs pa M€dhyamika is far from complete, even if the Indian M€dhyamika's emphasis on superimpositions could be a surprising source of legitimacy for the notion of a *dgag bya.* The dGe lugs exegesis of Chapter XV in the *Prasannapad€* and *M™lamadhyamakak€rik€s* is, for example, very different from what we have adopted, taking non-fabrication, immutability and independence, as being a *positive* description of a genuine nature, namely, voidness itself. As William Magee has pointed out in a recent publication, it is an exegesis which was contested by many Tibetans and which is also quite different from the way many major modern writers on Candrak…rti and N€g€rjuna (including Hayes, Jay Garfield and D. Seyfort Ruegg) have taken these chapters. Whereas Magee seems to think that Tsong kha pa can perhaps correct these writers, I would tend to think that the balance of the evidence comes down *against* Tsong kha pa here—there are good reasons why people read Chapter XV as they did, essentially the straightforwardness of reading what Candrak…rti says as he says it. See Chapters 3-5 in W. Magee, *The Nature of Things. Emptiness and Essence in the Geluk World.* Snow Lion, Ithaca N.Y., 1999.

what this *svabh€va* supposedly was, especially when it involved absurd properties like independence.[33] And of course why *not* formulate things clearly and starkly and expose fallacious theses for all to see? Isn't this what a rational, analytic reader and critic should do? In fact a so-called "Pr€sa‰gika M€dhyamika" like Candrak…rti potentially has a type of response, which we may not ultimately accept, but which is certainly not to be dismissed outright: bringing *svabh€va* out into stark clarity is impossible and even counterproductive, for how could one readily distinguish between superimposed intrinsic natures and the otherwise innocent customary things? The subtlety of the superimposition, and hence the difficulty in distinguishing it from the ordinary that should be conserved, is a key position of certain Tibetan Pr€sa‰gika commentators, who speak of the average man's life-world as a kind of inseparable "mixture" (*'dres pa*) between customary truth (which is innocent) and reification (which is not). But it is also implicit in Candrak…rti's discussion of *saˆv tim€tra*, the "merely customary"— merely customary things are not to be identified with what the average man sees and conceives, but are according to Candrak…rti, the ordinary as understood only by those who can see the world free of reifications, i.e., those Noble Ones (*€rya*) who have understood voidness and are free of grasping things as being true (*saty€bhim€na*). For these M€dhyamika writers there is thus a sense in which grasping at *svabh€va* can only thrive in the shadows.

An illustration from another context may be of use in showing possible dangers inherent in certain demands for clarity. The extreme difficulty of distinguishing the "purely ordinary" from the ignorant person's hybrid combination of ordinary-plus-superimpositions is not unlike that which, in another context, Wittgenstein faced in trying to separate what is right and wrong in our views on following rules. The ingrained tendency we have is to think that when we follow a rule, like adding two numbers, the results are already determined and implicitly present from the start—Wittgenstein's well-known phrase is that we think rule following is grounded in a "superlative fact". Nonetheless, someone asks "But *are* the steps then *not* determined by the algebraic formula... in a *queer* way, the use itself is in some sense present." To this Wittgenstein replies, "But of course it is "in some sense!" Really the only thing wrong with what you say is the expression "in a queer way". The rest is all right." [34]

One of the more interesting and persuasive analyses of the complexities inherent in philosophical reform of seemingly acceptable commonsense beliefs is that of Saul Kripke in his *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language*. The dangerous phase invariably comes in when we feel the need to formulate clearly what we deny and thus filter it out from what is acceptable in the commonsense belief: in other words, a problem arises when we try to explicitly separate the deep-seated queer way of taking things from what is all right and ordinary.

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[33] See Hayes op. cit. p. 324-325.

[34] See §195 in L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Blackwell, Oxford, 1989. This Wittgensteinian theme of queerness versus the ordinary is a major preoccupation of Stanley Cavell in his exegesis of the opening passages of the *Investigations* discussing the seductiveness of St. Augustine's theory of language. Cf. also his idea of the "uncanniness of the ordinary," e.g., p. 153-178 in his *In Quest of the Ordinary: Lines of Skepticism and Romanticism..* University of Chicago Press, 1988.

> "For in denying that there is any such fact, might we not be expressing a philosophical thesis that doubts or denies something everyone admits? .... We merely wish to deny the existence of the 'superlative fact' that philosophers misleadingly attach to such ordinary forms of words, not the propriety of the forms of words themselves. ...Whenever our opponent insists on the perfect propriety of an ordinary form of expression (e.g., that the 'the steps are determined by the formula', 'the future application is already present'), we can insist that if these expressions are properly understood, we agree. The danger comes when we try to formulate what we *are* denying—*what* 'erroneous interpretation' our opponent is placing on ordinary means of expression."[35]

The danger, i.e., a type of misplaced clarity, also seems to be what the Pr€sa‰gika M€dhyamika alleges to occur in the attempt to isolate ordinary customary things from their superimposed intrinsic natures—the superimpositions at stake look to be close to a type of "superlative fact",[36] i.e., a hard to isolate queer way of taking things that is held as necessary to ground the ordinary. The danger then is this: the M€dhyamika runs the risk of being simply dismissed as absurd when he lays out a general thesis as to *what* he is denying. From the M€dhyamika philosopher's own point of view, it is thus arguably defensible, and even perhaps profound, that this *svabh€va must* be non-obvious and remain so if it is not itself to be misconstrued and trivialized. And if we follow M€dhyamikas this far, then the starting point of the problem that Hayes and Robinson had in taking N€g€rjuna seriously will have been that they proceeded with clear generalized theses about what was to be denied. In setting out what *svabh€va* was in the form of axioms and theorems, they had already guaranteed that the M€dhyamika would be seen to be absurd: the queer way of taking the ordinary had lost all its potent grip and all its interest. No doubt there will be something disturbing here to the analytic reader intent on giving clear summaries of such and such a philosopher's theses : if a M€dhyamika philosophy like that of Candrak…rti is to receive a just and serious treatment, then the otherwise laudable intellectual work of dissection, disambiguation and formulating clear theses and general principles is not without danger of superficiality; indeed, in certain important areas, it is precisely *not* what we should be doing.

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35 See p. 69-70 in Saul A. Kripke, *Wittgenstein on Rules and Private Language.* Blackwell, Oxford, 1982.

36 See Wittgenstein op. cit. §192.

Nāgārjuna: Master of Paradox, Mystic or Perpetrator of Fallacies?

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1 Introductory remarks

In a chapter entitled "Nāgārjuna and the Limits of Thought," Jay Garfield and Graham Priest make the following observation about Nāgārjuna.

> ...his influence in the Mahāyāna Buddhist world is not only unparalleled in that tradition but exceeds in that tradition the influence of any single Western philosopher. The degree to which he is taken seriously by so many eminent Indian, Chinese, Tibetan, Korean, Japanese, and Vietnamese philosophers, and lately by so many Western philosophers, alone justifies attention to his corpus. Even were he not such a titanic figure historically, the depth and beauty of his thought and the austere beauty of his philosophical poetry would justify that attention. While Nāgārjuna may perplex and often infuriate, and while his texts may initially defy exegesis, anyone who spends any time with Nāgārjuna's thought inevitably develops a deep respect for this master philosopher. (Garfield & Priest, 2002, p. 86)

At least one of these claims—the last one— is false, for it is a universal proposition that can be falsified by citing a counterexample. I can cite myself as a counterexample to the proposition that "anyone who spends any time with Nāgārjuna's thought inevitably develops a deep respect for this master philosopher." Although I have worked with Nāgārjuna's texts off and on for more than thirty years, I am afraid I have not yet developed a deep respect for his thought, nor do I regard him as a masterful philosopher. Indeed, I could go on to say that, perhaps because of some profound insensitivity on my part I see very little of either depth or beauty or philosophical poetry in Nāgārjuna's work, nor can I claim to be either perplexed or infuriated by it. To make matters worse, I still have not changed my mind about Nāgārjuna's influence since I wrote the following in 1994:

*This paper was prepared to read before the Philosophy Department at Smith College.

> Nāgārjuna's writings had relatively little effect on the course of subsequent Indian Buddhist philosophy. Despite his apparent attempts to discredit some of the most fundamental concepts of abhidharma, abhidharma continued to flourish for centuries, without any appreciable attempt on the part of ābhidharmikas to defend their methods of analysis against Nāgārjuna's criticisms. And despite Nāgārjuna's radical critique of the very possibility of having grounded knowledge *(pramāṇa),* the epistemological school of Dignāga and Dharmakīrti dominated Indian Buddhist intellectual circles, again without any explicit attempt to answer Nāgārjuna's criticisms of their agenda. Aside from a few commentators on Nāgārjuna's works, who identified themselves as Mādhyamikas, Indian Buddhist intellectual life continued almost as if Nāgārjuna had never existed. (Hayes, 1994)

Clearly, there is some difference of opinion between Jay Garfield and myself. My principal task for today will not be to try to show that one or the other of us is correct in our assessment, for I think we are in a realm where the dictum *de gustibus non disputandum est* is applicable. Rather, what I should like to do today is simply to point out areas in which our tastes differ. In doing this, I should also like to consider some reflections to my 1994 paper offered by John A. Taber in an article called "On Nāgārjuna's So-called Fallacies: A Comparative Approach," since Taber, like Garfield, draws upon possible parallels among philosophers of several different traditions. As we shall see, however, Taber favors what could probably best be seen as a mystical interpretation of Nāgārjuna, while Garfield holds that

> Some interpreters of Nāgārjuna, indeed, succumb to the easy temptation to read him as a simple mystic or an irrationalist of some kind. But it is significant that none of the important commentarial traditions in Asia, however much they disagree in other respects, regard him in this light. And indeed most recent scholarship is unanimous in this regard as well, again despite a wide range of divergence in interpretations in other respects. Nāgārjuna is simply too committed to rigorous analytical argument to be dismissed as a mystic. (Garfield, 2002, p. 87)

Let me begin by recapitulating just a few key points from my 1994 paper, and then turn to Taber's response to that, and finally offer some reflections on Garfield's assessment of Nāgārjuna.

2 Nāgārjuna as a perpetrator of fallacies

In my own attempt to answer the question why so many prominent Indian Buddhist scholastics apparently ignored Nāgārjuna, neither bothering to refute him nor to make explicit improvements to the foundations he laid, I

drew attention to an answer to this very question provided by Richard Robinson 1972 in an article entitled "Did Nāgārjuna Really Refute All Philosophical Views?" In this article, Robinson compares Nāgārjuna's presentation to a sleight-of-hand trick, rather like the one of hiding a pea under one of three shells and then moving the shells so quickly that the observer loses track of which shell the pea is hidden under. As Robinson described Nāgārjuna's game:

> Its elements are few and its operations are simple, though performed at lightning speed and with great dexterity. And the very fact that he cannot quite follow each move reinforces the observer's conviction that there is a trick somewhere. The objective of this article is to identify the trick and to determine on some points whether or not it is legitimate.

The "trick" that Robinson discovered lay in Nāgārjuna's definition of the term "svabhāva" in such a way that it was self-contradictory. If the *svabhāva* as defined by Nāgārjuna exists, says Robinson, "it must belong to an existent entity, that is, it must be conditioned, dependent on other entities and possessed of causes. But by definition it is free from conditions, nondependent on others, and not caused. Therefore, it is absurd to maintain that a *svabhāva* exists" (Robinson, 1972, p. 326). Exposing the absurdity of the notion of *svabhāva* as defined by Nāgārjuna only does damage, of course, to those who actually used the term as defined by him. In the remainder of his article, Robinson shows that in fact none of Nāgārjuna's philosophical rivals did use the term "svabhāva" as he had redefined it, and therefore no one was really refuted by him. In his concluding remark, Robinson says:

> The nature of the Mādhyamika trick is now quite clear. It consists of (a) reading into the opponent's views a few terms which one defines for him in a self-contradictory way, and (b) insisting on a small set of axioms which are at variance with common sense and not accepted in their entirety by any known philosophy. It needs no insistence to emphasize that the application of such a critique does not demonstrate the inadequacy of reason and experience to provide intelligible answers to the usual philosophical questions.

While essentially agreeing with Robinson in his assessment of Nāgārjuna, I suggested that the Mādhyamika bag of tricks also contained one other ploy, namely, the liberal use of equivocation.

2.1 The case for equivocation

N.B This section is lifted entirely from Hayes (1994, p. 311–313).

It is important to note that the position that Nāgārjuna examines is the common Buddhist view based upon the notion that each simple property

(dharma) is distinguished from every other simple property in virtue of possessing its own distinct nature, called its *svabhāva* or its own nature, which is a nature that no other simple property has. Each property's own nature is in effect its identity, in the sense of that by which it is differentiated from others. In his criticism of this view, Nāgārjuna plays on an ambiguity in "svabhāva," the word for own nature. The word "sva-bhāva" means a nature *(bhāva)* that belongs to the thing itself *(svasya);* it refers, in other words, to a thing's identity. But Nāgārjuna takes advantage of the fact that the word "svabhāva" could also be interpreted to mean the fact that a thing comes into being *(bhavati)* from itself *(svataḥ)* or by itself *(svena);* on this interpretation, the term would refer to a thing's independence. Assuming this latter analysis of the word, rather than the one that most Buddhists actually held, Nāgārjuna then points out that whatever comes into being from conditions is not coming into being from itself; and if a thing does not come into being from itself, then it has no *svabhāva.* But if a thing has no *svabhāva,* he says, it also has no *parabhāva.* Here, too, Nāgārjuna takes advantage of an ambiguity in the key word he is examining. The word "para-bhāva" can be analysed to mean either 1) that which has the nature *(bhāva)* of another thing *(parasya),* that is, a difference, or 2) the fact of coming into being *(bhavati)* from another thing *(parataḥ),* that is a dependence.

When one reads Nāgārjuna's argument in Sanskrit, it is not immediately obvious that the argument has taken advantage of an ambiguity in the key term. But when one tries to translate his argument into some other language, such as English or Tibetan, one finds that it is almost impossible to translate his argument in a way that makes sense in translation. This is because the terms in the language of translation do not have precisely the same range of ambiguities as the words in the original Sanskrit. In English, we are forced to disambiguate, and in disambiguating, we end up spoiling the apparent integrity of the argument.

Let's look at the phrasing of Nāgārjuna's argument in the original Sanskrit and see why it looks plausible. The original argument as stated in MMK 1:5 reads:

> na hi svabhāvo bhāvānāṃ pratyayādiṣu vidyate |
> avidyamāne svabhāve parabhāvo na vidyate | |
>
> Surely beings have no *svabhāva* when they have causal conditions. And if there is no *svabhāva,* there is no *parabhāva.*

As we have seen above, the word "svabhāva" can be interpreted in two different ways. It can be rendered either as **identity** (which I shall call svabhāva_1) or as **causal independence** (svabhāva_2). Similarly, the word "parabhāva" can be interpreted in two ways. It can be rendered as **difference** (parabhāva_1), or as **dependence** (parabhāva_2).

Now the sentence in MMK 1:5ab makes perfectly good sense if it is understood as employing svabhāva_2.

Statement 1 Surely beings have no **causal independence** when they have causal conditions. (na hi svabhāvaḥ bhāvānām pratyaya-ādiṣu vidyate |)

Statement 1 makes sense at face value, because it is obviously true that if something is dependent upon causal conditions, it is not independent of causal conditions. The sentence in MMK 1:5cd, on the other hand, makes better sense if it is understood as employing svabhāva_1 and parabhāva_1.

Statement 2 And if there is no **identity**, then there is no **difference**. (avidyamāne svabhāve parabhāvaḥ na vidyate |)

Statement 2 also makes sense at face value, because a thing's identity is understood as a feature that distinguishes the thing from things other than itself; if a thing has no such features, then it has no identity and is therefore not distinguishable or different from other things.

It would be much more difficult to get a true statement out of the sentence in MMK 1:5cd if it were understood as employing svabhāva_2 and parabhāva_2.

Statement 3 And if [beings have] no **independence**, then they have no **dependence**. (avidyamāne svabhāve parabhāvaḥ na vidyate |)

Indeed statement 3 seems to be quite false at face value. So if one gives Nāgārjuna the benefit of the doubt by assuming that he was trying to write sentences that were true (or at least appeared to be true at face value), one is likely to reject statement 3 as the correct interpretation of MMK 1:5cd and to adopt statement 2.

The problem that now arises is this: no matter how much sense statement 2 may make as an independent statement, it does not at all follow from statement 1. It only appears to follow in the original Sanskrit because of the ambiguity of the expressions involved. A careful logician would not be deceived by Nāgārjuna's argument, but it is phrased in such a way that it might very well take the unwary reader off guard.

3 Nāgārjuna and the principle of co-existing counterparts

My claim that Nāgārjuna's arguments are vitiated by logical fallacies has not gone unchallenged. One published response to this claim was presented in an interesting article by John Taber. While broadly agreeing that there may be something amiss in Nāgārjuna's reasoning, Taber maintains that I have misidentified the nature of the putative error that Nāgārjuna has made—I say "putative error" because, as we shall see in a moment, Taber eventually argues that what Nāgārjuna is doing may be something that is not at all undermined by the type of reasoning he offers. With reference to MMK 1.5, which says "Surely beings have no *svabhāva* when they have causal conditions, and if there is no *svabhāva*, there is no *parabhāva*," Taber says:

> If any fallacy is committed in karika 5, then, it is not a fallacy of equivocation but rather . . . the fallacy—if it is a fallacy—that a thing cannot be a certain type unless its counterpart exists simultaneously with it. I shall call this the principle of coexisting counterparts. (Taber, 1998, p.216)

Later on in his paper, Taber elaborates on this point:

> The principle of coexisting counterparts appears *prima facie* to ignore the fact that a thing in the first instance is what it is by virtue of its inherent properties and is only secondarily related to its counterparts, whatever those may be. A thing's being related to its counterparts can be said to be contingent in the sense that it derives from more basic properties that define the thing as such as well as other, external circumstances. Thus a dog is something other than a cat. But its being a dog is prior to whatever relation it may have to other creatures; it is a dog by virtue of the properties inherent in it. Only because it has those properties—and a cat has the properties that it has—is it other than a cat. Similarly, a woman is a mother of a child only secondarily. First and foremost she is a woman, and it is by virtue of her properties as a woman, as well as other circumstances, that she is a mother. She does not depend on the child in order to exist as a woman. (Taber, 1998, 217–218)

In what I regard to be the most interesting section of Taber's article, he explores the possibility that this principle of co-existing counterparts need not be seen as a fallacy at all. Rather, he says, Nāgārjuna's seemingly odd way of proceeding may well have stemmed from a profound experience of the interconnectedness of all things. Read in this way, Nāgārjuna could be seen as promoting a kind of thinking found in numerous mystical traditions—and, one might add, in Jungian psychology—in which one finds various ways of playing with the notion of the coincidence of opposites or the interpenetration of all entities. Taber makes a case for this possibility by citing various passages from such authors as Spinoza and Chuang-tzŭ and showing that there may well be a congruence between their thinking and Nāgārjuna's and suggesting that all these authors may have had insights similar to those of Heraclitus and Leibniz and various authors of the Hua-yen tradition of Buddhism. Being careful not to overstep the bounds of his textual evidence, Taber admits that this reading of Nāgārjuna is merely one of several possibilities.

> Obviously, it would take us too far afield to try to document the idea in all these sources, and it would be impossible to show conclusively that it is precisely the same idea that is expressed in all of them. I can only assert somewhat baldly here, with the hope that the reader shares the impression, that the notion—or different versions of the notion—that everything in the cosmos is inti-

> mately tied together, so that the existence of one implies the existence of all, even of that to which it is essentially opposed, occurs in a range of texts.
>
> I propose that the MMK be seen as an attempt to articulate this vision, which for Nāgārjuna is ultimately based not on discursive reasoning but on some kind of non-discursive insight. In that case, the MMK should be seen as a transformative text which does not attempt to demonstrate the truth of interconnectedness, but rather to illustrate its implications in complete detail—the main implication for him being that the world of appearances is unreal—and thereby ultimately evoke the intuitive insight upon which it is based in the reader. The principle of coexisting counterparts, then, which contains the idea of the intercormectedness of entities in seed form, is not employed by Nāgārjuna as a premise—of his own or anyone else's—in his arguments. Rather, it represents his final position; it is the realization with which his philosophy begins and ends. As such, it cannot be criticized from the standpoint of common sense, and so cannot be declared a "fallacy;" for that would beg the very question at issue in Nāgārjuna's thought.
>
> Thus I suggest that Nāgārjuna might only pretend in the MMK to demonstrate in rigorous philosophical fashion the illusory nature of the world. In reality his arguments serve only to describe the interconnectedness, hence illusoriness, of all phenomena, not establish it as true. They function to convey knowledge simply by displaying the perspective of highest truth in the fullest possible terms. The reader is not compelled to adopt that perspective by rigorous logic, but is invited to do so by making a paradigm shift, if you will—a leap beyond ordinary experience. Viewed in this way, the principle of co-existing counterparts can once again hardly be dismissed as a fallacy, a mere mistake of reasoning, because it expresses Nāgārjuna's main metaphysical insight. While it may be false, it cannot be trivially so. It hardly seems satisfactory to dismiss it on grounds of common sense, since the gist of the principle is to call common sense into question. (Taber, 1998, p. 237)

It should be clear from this passage that Taber, in describing Nāgārjuna as a thinker who had insights like those of various people whom we might call mystics, is hardly dismissing him. On the contrary, he is attempting to find a reading more charitable and felicitous than those put forward by Robinson and myself. Taber's is a reading that does not require seeing Nāgārjuna as Robinson and I do, namely, as a relatively primitive thinker whose mistakes in reasoning were eventually uncovered as the knowledge of logic in India became more sophisticated in subsequent centuries.

4 Nāgārjuna as an explorer beyond the frontiers of thought

Let me turn now to a discussion of the paper by Graham Priest and Jay Garfield entitled "Nāgārjuna and the Limits of Thought." Since I assume this paper, or at least the views expressed in it, are well known in these parts, I shall not attempt a synopsis of it. Rather, what I should like to do is to offer a few observations on some specific points brought up in that paper. Let me by quoting a couple of passages that discusses two concepts that are at the heart of Nāgārjuna's presentation, namely, the doctrine of two truths and the concept of *svabhāva* as the term is apparently understood by Nāgārjuna. First, the two truth theory, which is explained by Garfield and Priest in the following way:

> Central to Nāgārjuna's view is his doctrine of the two realities. There exist, according to Nāgārjuna, conventional reality and ultimate reality. Correspondingly, there are Two Truths: conventional truth, the truth about conventional reality; and ultimate truth, the truth about the ultimate reality—qua ultimate reality. For this reason, discussion of Nāgārjuna's view is often phrased in terms of Two Truths, rather than two realities. (Garfield & Priest, 2002, p. 90)

Although this way of stating things has become standard and probably accurately reflects usage for the passage fifteen hundred years or so, I am afraid it may distort the picture of Nāgārjuna's agenda. To speak of two realities makes the central question seem to be primarily one of ontology, of what there is. And insofar as it is framed as a question about reality, it may also be seen as a question about semantics, the relationship between what there is and how what there is expressed in symbols or thought about through symbol-based propositional thinking. Clearly, this is the issue that most preoccupies Garfield and Priest, who depict Nāgārjuna as a frontiersman adventurously exploring what they call the limits of thought. Although this way of speaking about Nāgārjuna is no doubt very appealing to modern philosophers who have become high by sniffing the fumes of various 20th century European philosophers, I suspect that Nāgārjuna's program was probably considerably more down to earth.

Let me first say something about the theory of two so-called truths, What I should like to argue is that the distinction between *paramārtha* and *vyavahāra* is less concerned with ontology and semantics than with axiology, that is, with making judgements of value. The literal meaning of the term "paramārtha" is the highest or most excellent (*parama*) goal or objective (*artha*). For a Buddhist, of course, this is *nirvāṇa,* which is the eradication of the root causes of unpleasant experience (*duḥkha*). Here a contrast is being made between two basic orientations to life, or between two goods (*satya*). The lower of the two goods is the commercial good (*vyavahāra-satya*), which

brings only limited and temporary forms of contentment. The highest good (paramārtha-satya) is the lasting contentment that comes of having ceased to be attached. Attachment, of course, can be to various kinds of acquisition, both material and intellectual. Numerous Buddhist practices are effective in reducing attachment to material acquisitions. What Nāgārjuna claims he was offering was a method of reducing the attachment to intellectual attainments, such as views (*dṛṣṭi*) and even to the very process of thinking (*prapañca*). The holding of views is one of the many things that was said by the Buddha to result in disputation and competition, and ultimately to such forms of gross incompetence as violence and war. It is in this context, I believe, that we must understand the Buddha's statement "na mama pratijñā," which is often translated as Garfield and Priest render it: "I have no proposition" (Garfield & Priest, 2002, p. 98). As they point out, this certainly sounds self-contradictory, for "I have no proposition" sounds very much like a proposition. The locution of Nāgārjuna's is not quite so paradoxical, however, when we recall that the Sanskrit term "pratijñā" does not mean just any proposition. Rather it means a proposition in a dispute, a proposition for which one is prepared to adduce evidence to advance and defend in a competitive game. To say that one has no *pratijñā* is not to say that one is not saying; rather, it is to say that one is not going to argue with someone else in a competitive way that will produce a joyous winner—and therefore a mournful loser. This is not a statement about the limits of thought, but about making the aesthetic choice not to mar the potential beauty of life through unnecessary disputation that disturbs everyone's peace of mind.

Although I have misgivings about seeing Nāgārjuna as an adumbration of such clever Europeans as Wittgenstein, Heidegger and Derridas, let me continue to quote Garfield and Priest in their discussion of ultimate truth. They go on to say this:

> What is ultimate truth/reality, according to Nāgārjuna? To understand this, we have to understand the notion of emptiness, which for Nāgārjuna is emphatically not nonexistence, but, rather, interdependent existence. For something to have an essence (Tibetan, *rang bzhin*; Sanskrit, *svabhāva*) is for it to be what it is, in and of itself, independently of all other things. (This entails, incidentally, that things that are essentially so are eternally so; for if they started to be, or ceased to be, then their so being would depend on other things, such as time.) To be empty is precisely to have no essence, in this sense. (Garfield & Priest, 2002, p. 91)

In saying this, Garfield and Priest have made an important observation. Incidentally, their observation reinforces the point made by Robinson and cited above, namely, his observation that Nāgārjuna defined the term "svabhāva" differently than the followers of the abhidharma tradition had done, and we might add his definition is also different from that used later by Dharmakīrti. Because the ābhidharmikas and epistemologists used the term differently

from how Nāgārjuna used it, his claim that beings have no *svabhāva* of the sort that he envisioned did not at all deter them from saying that all beings do have *svabhāvas* of the sort that they envisioned. What Nāgārjuna is saying is that no being has is a fixed and permanent nature. What the ābhidarmikas maintained was that everything has features that distinguish it from other things. What Dharmakīrti maintained was that the distinguishing features of a being is nothing but the totality of specific causal factors (*hetusāmagrī*) on which the being uniquely depends. As John Taber points out, Nāgārjuna's tendency to use key terms in ways importantly different from how the person he tries to refute uses them is an example of the fallacy that the Naiyāyika philosophers called *chala*. *Chala* is defined as basing a refutation of a position on a term defined otherwise than how the term was defined by the opponent being refuted. It is, in other words, a particular kind of equivocation. In addition to the two distinct ways that Nāgārjuna himself uses the term "svabhāva," we can add these ways the term was used by other Buddhists. It is not difficult to see that all the ingredients have been gathered for a rather spectacular and messy philosophical muddle. Indeed, this muddle has kept Buddhist thinkers busy thinking for nearly two millennia.

5 Conclusions

Let me end by simply stating a few points that seem to remain open for fruitful discussion. First, I still find it intriguing that there can be such a difference in opinion between those who see Nāgārjuna as a trickster with a rather limited bag of tricks that he used with tediously predictable regularity and those who see in Nāgārjuna a philosopher of almost unparalleled significance. I wonder whether there is a way to find a felicitous middle way between these two evidently extreme views.

Second, I am struck by the fact that although the analyses of Robinson, Taber, Garfield and Priest differ in some important ways, they are not really at odds with one another. Agreeing with one of them does not require disagreeing with the others. It is quite possible, for example, that Taber was essentially correct in his portrayal of Nāgārjuna's insight into the interconnectedness of all things and that he was a mystic in the sense of someone who realized that wisdom consists in making space in one's thinking for opposites. To be a mystic in this sense is not at all to be a mystic in the sense that Garfield and Priest use the term, where it seems to mean an irrationalist who eschews logic and disparages the enterprise of offering systematic argumentation. Where Garfield and Priest clearly depart from Taber is that they see Nāgārjuna as seriously trying to put forth rigorous argumentation, while Taber suggests that he may have been only pretending to offer rigorous arguments. This makes Taber's Nāgārjuna, if not a trickster, at least an ironist.

Finally, there is no necessary tension between Garfield's claim that Nāgārjuna made a serious attempt to argue for a particular view of reality the claim by Robinson and me that in so doing he put forward fallacious argu-

ments. I am inclined to agree that Nāgārjuna had a serious philosophical agenda. It seems pretty clear to me that he wrote the *Mūla-madhyamaka-kārikā* with the intention of making making a knock-down argument against anything that might stand as a candidate to be a self (*ātman*). So seriously did he take the Indian Buddhist taboo against selfhood that he was not content with the standard Buddhist view that a complex being, such as a human being, has only a derivative self—a self derived from its constituent parts. He apparently felt an obsessive need to take the doctrine of non-self to its ultimate conclusion by showing that even the consituent parts of a complex being have no self. As Candrakīrti makes explicit, a *svabhāva* is to a constituent part as an *ātman* is to a sentient being, so what offering a demolition of the concept of *svabhāva* accomplishes is that it robs the complex being even of derivative selfhood. Taking all possibility of any kind of selfhood out of the picture was clearly Nāgārjuna's agenda. It is my opinion that he failed to accomplish what he said out to do, because he availed himself of faulty logic.

Given that I have still not been convinced that Nāgārjuna's project was not vitiated by serious flaws in his argumentation, I am naturally less inclined to take what Garfield and Priest have dubbed "Nāgārjuna's paradox" as an interesting paradox. Garfield and Priest describe what they call Nāgārjuna's paradox as follows:

> If Nāgārjuna is correct in his critique of essence, and if it hence turns out that all things lack fundamental natures, it turns out they all have the same nature, that is, emptiness, and hence both have and lack that very nature.

While I agree that we might have an interesting paradox if Nāgārjuna was correct in his critique of essence, I do not think Nāgārjuna succeeded in his critique. So the paradox named for him turns out to be to very interesting. The interesting paradoxes, I take it, are those that, like the liar's paradox and Russell's paradox, use unexceptionable logic to arrive at surprising conclusions. Perhaps someone—let's call him pseudo-Nāgārjuna—may yet succeed in generating an interesting paradox of the type that Garfield and Priest describe. When that day comes, then Nāgārjuna's uniinteresting pseudo-paradox may give way to pseudo-Nāgārjuna's interesting paradox.

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The nature of the Mādhyamika trick

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Abstract This paper evaluates several recent efforts to interpret the work of Nāgārjuna through the lens of modern symbolic logic. An attempt is made to uncover the premises that justify the use of symbolic logic for this purpose. This is accomplished through a discussion of (1) the historical origins of those premises in the Indian and Tibetan traditions, and (2) how such assumptions prejudice our understanding of Nāgārjuna's insistence that he has no "proposition" (*pratijñā*). Finally, the paper sets forth an alternative interpretation that takes into account the literary dimensions of Nāgārjuna's writing.

Keywords Madhyamaka · Symbolic Logic · Textual Exegesis · Doxography · Reason and Mysticism

The nature of the Mādhyamika trick is now quite clear.

– Richard Robinson

I

The conviction that the past has become present in the reading or writing of history brings with it one of the great pleasures of the intellectual life. And yet, as with all convictions — and all pleasures — even the most profound sense of historical authenticity is enmeshed in a complicated set of needs and desires.

It may be worthwhile, from this perspective, to take a closer look at attempts to read Nāgārjuna through the lens of modern symbolic logic. The

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conclusions of such research have been presented as "pure historical exegesis" approaching "the ideal of detached, scientific objectivity," in contrast to readings derived through the application of interpretive strategies based on other genres of modern philosophical thought, which are labeled "ethnocentric" and historically naive. Richard Robinson's work is perhaps the most illustrious example of the type; it has furnished a model for subsequent studies, including an article by Richard Hayes in which the author repeatedly acknowledges his debt to Robinson (Hayes 1994).[1] Hayes' thesis rests on a central claim, summed up in his conviction that Nāgārjuna "had a set of definitely stated doctrines for which he was trying to produce a systematically arranged set of rational arguments" (ibid.: 363). Hayes presents no specific arguments in support of this claim; rather it functions, in the context of his paper, not as a conclusion, but as a point of departure, a premise. A similar premise seems to bolster the work of two other contemporary interpreters of Nāgārjuna, Tom Tillemans and Jay Garfield.[2] For example, Tillemans writes that "one must... suppose that [Nāgārjuna] believed his own reasoning by *reductio ad absurdum* to be not a mere ruse or sophism, but rather an argument that was valid and that resulted in a true conclusion..." (Tillemans 1999: 191). Elsewhere he writes of "the seriousness of argumentation in the Madhyamaka system" and "the numerous rigorous arguments advanced by the Madhyamaka" (ibid.: 190). For Garfield, Nāgārjuna is "committed to rigorous analytical argument" and to "true contradictions commanding rational assent" (Garfield 2002: 87).

Hayes, Tillemans, and Garfield share a common desire to characterize Nāgārjuna as an analytic, rationalist philosopher. All three assume not only that his writing *can* be successfully translated into the terms of modern symbolic logic, but that it may in fact benefit from such translation, which has the virtue of clarifying his language and freeing it from the onerous temptation to read him "as a simple mystic or an irrationalist of some kind" (ibid.: 87).[3] They differ quite radically, however, in their ultimate assessment of whether or not his project holds up under such close scrutiny. Garfield (2002: 105) claims to have uncovered an entirely unique ontological paradox "found nowhere else," "a property of emptiness... whose centrality to philosophy [Nāgārjuna] first demonstrates." Tillemans (1999: 197) is a bit more guarded.

[1] It will become clear enough in what follows that I have my disagreements with Hayes, concerning both his presuppositions and his conclusions. Nevertheless, I enjoyed reading the essay. In our efforts to take Nāgārjuna's writing seriously as philosophy we occupy, I believe, an important common ground.

[2] See Ruegg (1977) for a summary of various attempts to render the Madhyamaka's use of the tetralemma into the terms of classical Western logic.

[3] Cf. Tillemans (1999: 188–189): "The idea... that Indian philosophy is essentially mystical and that *hence* it is bereft of rational argumentation is a *non-sequitor*. Let us suppose that a good part of these traditions are influenced by some type of mysticism: it does not *thereby* follow that rational argumentation stemming from or leading to those mystical ideas will be absent or insignificant." Hayes echoes these sentiments when he characterizes Nāgārjuna as conforming to "the Indian Buddhist tradition [which] was for the most part quite insistent on sound argumentation" (Hayes 1994: 300).

He leaves open the possibility that Nāgārjuna has successfully exploited ‘‘a logic without ontological commitment.’’ Hayes, on the other hand, finds Nāgārjuna’s arguments to be fallacious and therefore unconvincing to a ‘‘logically astute reader’’ (Hayes 1994: 299). In his view the counterintuitive conclusions reached through Nāgārjuna’s faulty logic could appeal only to modern proponents of a deviant logic, or outright opponents of logic of any kind, both of whom are searching for ‘‘the sort of comfort that attends finding famous and highly respected antecedents to one’s own position’’ (ibid.: 363).[4]

There is one other way in which they appear to differ. Although all three see obvious merit in their use of symbolic logic as a tool for understanding Nāgārjuna’s work, Garfield seems to offer a kind of historical disclaimer when he writes that what he is doing is ‘‘not textual history, but rational reconstruction’’ (Garfield 2002: 88). Tillemans acknowledges that the expression ‘‘Buddhist logic’’ does not translate any Sanskrit term, but he nevertheless locates his project historically as ‘‘a translation — as faithful as possible — into modern logic of the formal structures of thought found in Buddhist texts’’ (Tillemans 1999: 191–192). Of the three, Hayes appears most confident about his privileged access to Nāgārjuna’s own, original thought, and his position in this matter warrants special consideration.

Hayes draws a stark distinction between interpretive, hermeneutical studies grounded in the search for contemporary relevance and the work of rigorous historical exegesis, which ‘‘attempts to discover what a text meant in the time it was written’’ (ibid.: 362). Such a distinction presupposes that it is possible for a competently trained historian to, so to speak, set aside his modern spectacles and read and understand a classical Indian text in the context of the time it was written without being compromised by interests characteristic of his or her own historical milieu. D.S. Ruegg, Christian Lindtner and Kamaleswar Bhattacharya are offered as examples of scholars ‘‘who appear to come very close to the ideal of detached and scientific objectivity’’ (ibid.: 362). It is clear that Hayes sees himself not as a ‘‘philosopher’’ or ‘‘preacher’’ (ibid.), but rather as a hard-nosed historian whose project is ‘‘to place [Nāgārjuna] firmly in his own classical context, disregarding his relevance, or lack thereof, to modern times’’ (ibid.: 326). We are meant to understand, in other words, that he deals with logical and historical facts, and not with interpretation, speculation, or homily. Nevertheless, when Hayes associates himself with Robinson, Ruegg, Lindtner and Bhattacharya in his efforts to achieve ‘‘the ideal of detached and scientific objectivity’’ he is advocating not only a style of scholarship but a particular epistemology as well — and a

[4] Both Tillemans and Garfield are at pains to demonstrate that Nāgārjuna’s logic is in conformity with the fundamental theorems of classical logic. While Garfield acknowledges that Nāgārjuna’s logic occupies a significant common ground with Wittgenstien, Heidegger, and Derrida (among others), he insists that this fact alone ‘‘does not demonstrate that he has any special value to us’’ (Garfield 2002: 105).

questionable one, at that.[5] When this ideal of objectivity is aligned with the effort "to explain the Mādhyamika system solely in terms of philosophical currents present in the India of [Nāgārjuna's] day" (ibid.: 352), and further contrasted with an "ethnocentrism in which we assume that what we modern Westerners find of greatest importance and value must also be what the classical Indian Buddhists found of greatest importance and value" (ibid.: 352), we have then entered the realm of polemics.[6]

The charge of ethnocentrism cuts both ways. One might point out, for example, that the very idea of this sort of detached, "scientific" analysis is itself embedded in an entirely modern, value-laden, ethnocentric view of truth which has for some years now been the subject of any number of influential critiques directed at precisely these concerns. To engage in an exhaustive review of the relevant literature would be an enormous task. Suffice it to cite a few examples from the realm of philosophy of science, where we have the writings of Karl R. Popper, Imre Lakatos, Thomas Kuhn, Michael Polanyi, and Paul Feyerabend — men whose work spanned the second half of the 20th century, profoundly challenging the assumptions underlying the belief in scientific objectivity through an historical analysis of its origins and development in late medieval Europe. According to an interview with Feyerabend in *Scientific American*, his book *Against Method* — presently translated into 16 languages — has become "a staple of courses on the philosophy of science" (Horgon 1993: 36). In the same interview Feyerabend recalls how he was

[5] Cf. the comments of another modern scholar of Buddhist logic, Dreyfus (1997: 9), who has not missed the implicit bias of any claim to "detached scientific objectivity": "However methodologically refined our works may be, they do not come into existence from a position of absolute neutrality but reflect our historical situation... Ethically and methodologically useful at times, the injunction to absolute neutrality usually given to modern scholars obscures the epistemological nature of the interpretive process." Donald Lopez's discussion of "commentators ancient and postmodern" (Lopez 1996: Ch. 10) is also relevant here; especially his distinction between "psychological association" and "historical association" (ibid.: 246ff): "What distinguishes the ancient commentator from the postmodern, then, is the historical consciousness available to the latter and its attendant demand to historicize not only the root text but the very act of commentary itself... Buddhist texts and theories about Buddhist texts are always in a state of mutual interchange, making a neutral and merely descriptive theory of textual interpretation impossible" (ibid.: 258).

[6] Such polemics are nothing new to Buddhist Studies. As early as 1923 A.B. Keith took a remarkably similar position in his criticism of the Russian scholar Theodor Stcherbatsky: "Yet another, and perhaps more serious, defect in the most popular of current expositions of Buddhism is the determination to modernize, to show that early in Buddhist thought we find fully appreciated ideas which have only slowly and laboriously been elaborated in Europe, and are normally regarded as the particular achievement of modern philosophy. Now there is nothing more interesting or legitimate than, on the basis of a careful investigation of any ancient philosophy, to mark in what measure it attains conceptions familiar in modern thought; but it is a very different thing to distort early ideas in order to bring them up to date, and the futility of the process may be realized when it is remembered that every generation which yields to the temptation will succeed in finding its own conceptions foreshadowed" (Keith 1923: 3–4). Like Hayes and Robinson, Keith as well was a rationalist interested in maintaining a clear distinction between "modern scientific advances" and "what the Buddhists thought" (ibid.: 18). The conversation between Keith and Stcherbatsky went on for some two decades, and provides an illuminating parallel to the issues raised in the present paper. Cf. Huntington (2007) for a fuller discussion of this material.

teaching at Berkeley in the sixties to a student body that included growing numbers of Mexicans, African-Americans and Indians when he began seriously to question the nature of his task. ‘‘Who was I to tell these people what and how to think? Their ancestors had developed cultures of their own, colorful languages, harmonious views of the relations between man and man and man and nature whose remnants are a living criticism of the tendencies of separation, analysis, self-centeredness inherent in Western thought’’ (ibid.). Most relevant in the present context, Feyerabend’s Who’s Who entry ends with a characteristically shocking assertion: ‘‘Leading intellectuals with their zeal for objectivity... are criminals, not the liberators of mankind’’ (ibid.). The author of the interview continues,

> Beneath these provocations lies a serious message: the human compulsion to find absolute truths, however noble, too often culminates in tyranny of the mind, or worse. Only an extreme skepticism toward science — and open-mindedness toward other modes of knowledge and ways of life, however alien — can help us avoid this danger. Feyerabend expresses this view in a paradox in his 1987 book *Farewell to Reason*: ‘‘The best education consists in immunizing people against systematic attempts at education.’’ (ibid.)

When the practical demand for empirical objectivity is inflated into a metaphysical claim, then science becomes the basis for ‘‘scientism’’ — a dogmatic ideology within which any appeal to subjective phenomena is *taboo*. As Alan Wallace (2000) has persuasively argued, this taboo of subjectivity severely compromises any effort to understand philosophies and practices associated with the ‘‘ritual thought’’[7] of contemplative traditions, where the realm of introspective experience is granted considerable authority.

Both Robinson and Hayes — champions of ‘‘the ideal of detached scientific objectivity’’ — are at pains throughout their writing to point out that, when it comes to analytical thinking, Nāgārjuna and his contemporaries were ‘‘infinitely less sophisticated’’ than modern philosophers (cf. Hayes 1994: 337).[8] Hayes cites Robinson approvingly in this context and makes it clear throughout his article that he sees his own use of ‘‘modern canons of validity’’ (ibid.: 323) to uncover the ‘‘various fallacies and tricks’’ inherent in Nāgārjuna’s work as an extension of Robinson’s earlier project of ‘‘historical exegesis’’ which attempts ‘‘to place [Nāgārjuna] firmly in his own classical context, disregarding his relevance, or lack thereof, to modern times’’ (ibid.: 326).

To engage in this sort of polemic is, I believe, to snare oneself in an irresolvable contradiction. How is the application of a thoroughly modern, culture-bound ideal of ‘‘detached scientific objectivity’’ to analysis of the *Madhyamakārikā*-s any different from the attempt to read the same text

[7] See Faure (2004: 48), cited below, p. 831.

[8] A.B. Keith (see note 6: above) was more blunt in his assessment of ‘‘the crudities of the Buddha’s views’’ and the futility of ‘‘our natural desire to... find reason prevailing in a barbarous age’’ (ibid.: 26).

through the lens of logical positivism, empiricism, pragmatism or deconstruction — all of which are dismissed by Hayes (ibid.: 363) as attempts to secure "the sort of comfort that attends finding famous and highly respected antecedents to one's own position"? In fact all of these approaches to exegesis — including Hayes' appeal to symbolic logic — embody certain sets of assumptions shared by certain influential groups of contemporary intellectuals; in principle none of them is any more or less immune to the charge of anachronism or ethnocentrism when applied to the interpretation of an ancient Sanskrit text.

I do not mean to suggest that we should abandon all attempts to read a classical text in the context of its own times; this is where we must always begin, for if we can not claim to have some real appreciation of the original conversation which produced the author's words then any effort to find contemporary relevance in the text is necessarily futile. However, our notion of history ought, at this point, to be more acutely attuned to the risks involved in any serious desire to absent oneself from personal responsibility for the conclusions of one's research. That the writing of history never has been a value-free enterprise has been for some time now a rather banal observation, and any appeal to objectivity can too easily function as a mask obscuring the historian's own interests. Much better to do what Hayes himself seems to suggest toward the end of his essay, and simply make one's agenda clear (ibid.: 362).[9]

To speak of an agenda, in this context, is to speak of assumptions, presuppositions, premises, or beliefs that furnish the necessary ground on which every argument is built. Even the most dazzling conceptual edifice rests on a subterranean foundation of desire. Such premises are often either partially or wholly removed from view, so fundamentally unquestionable as to be taken for granted by the author and — if he is skillful enough — by his readers as well. We therefore must constantly ask ourselves: On what essential

[9] However, the force of Hayes' suggestion here is compromised by his attempt to make an airtight distinction between exegesis ("attempts to discover what a text meant in the time it was written") and hermeneutics ("attempts to find the meaning of a text for the time in which the interpreter lives"). In practice, both exegesis and hermeneutics are, inevitably, ways of constructing meaning in an inescapably historical context that includes both the object of investigation and the historian himself. On this see Bernard Lewis' eloquent survey of the historical method (Lewis 1975), which relies on a considerably more flexible distinction between three intermeshed forms of history: First, "remembered history" consists of simple statements about the past that form the collective memory of a community. Second, "recovered history" which is, in some sense, "the reconstruction of a forgotten past... *But reconstruction begs the basic question, and disguises what would be better described as construction. The word itself indicates the dangers of the process...*" (ibid.: 12 [italics mine]). And third, "invented history:" by definition, "history for a purpose," "history devised or interpreted" on the basis of the first two. What separates recovered history from invented history is itself, ironically, a matter of interpretation: "The essential and distinctive feature of scholarly research is, or should be, that it is not directed to predetermined results. The historian does not set out to prove a thesis, or select material to establish some point, but follows the evidence where it leads. No human being is free from human failings, among them loyalties and prejudices which may color his perception and presentation of history. The essence of the critical scholarly historian is that he is aware of this fact, and instead of indulging his prejudices seeks to identify and correct them" (ibid.: 54).

understanding does the work as a whole rest? What is assumed to be beyond question? Where does this author *begin* his argument?

In the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, Nāgārjuna responds to his Nyāya interlocutor with the following: ‘‘If I had anything to assert, then I would fail. Because I have no proposition, I therefore can not fail.’’[10] Citing these same lines from the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, Garfield (2002: 98) baldly exclaims: ‘‘Nāgārjuna's reply does not deny that he is asserting anything. How could he deny *that?*’’ Tillemans is a bit less blunt. In dismissing earlier understandings of the Madhymaka's appeal to logic as ‘‘nothing but a psychological technique’’ (his gloss on the Sanskrit *upāya*), he asserts that such understandings ‘‘nearly always have as their consequence the denial of any *propositional content* or truth value as applicable to any of the tetralemma's four negations. And it is precisely in this regard that this interpretation is insufficient, for it minimizes the role and the seriousness of argumentation in the Madhyamaka system’’ (Tillemans 1999: 190 [italics mine]). Finally, Hayes (1994: 363) writes: ‘‘...it appears to me on examining the textual evidence that Nāgārjuna had a set of definitely stated doctrines for which he was trying to produce a systematically arranged set of rational arguments. That he failed in this task does not diminish his importance within the history of Buddhist philosophy.’’

If the citation from the *Vigrahavyāvartanī* (above) were an anomaly, then the logician's perspective would be considerably easier to accommodate. Such is not the case. In fact, the unqualified rejection of any sort of ‘‘definitely stated doctrine’’ — whether in the form of a philosophical view (*dṛṣṭi*), thesis (*pakṣa*), or proposition (*pratijñā*) — is not only a leitmotif of Nāgārjuna's writing, it is arguably the defining feature of his work, its single most troubling aspect, one with which any serious attempt at interpretation must come to grips.[11]

[10] Bhattacharya et al., (1978: 80): *yadi kā cana pratijñā syān me tata eṣa me bhaved doṣaḥ/nāsti ca mama pratijñā tasmān naivāsti me doṣaḥ//*. Like Hayes (1994: 302), in my translation I too have tried to use ‘‘ordinary language as much as possible so as not to employ technical terms that would favor one philosophical interpretation over any other.’’ Consulting Monier-Williams' Sanskrit Dictionary under *pratijñā*, one finds ‘‘a statement, assertion, declaration, affirmation; (in logic) a proposition, the assertion or proposition to be proved;’’ and for *doṣa* (as in ‘‘I have no *doṣa*’’): ‘‘fault..., damage, harm, bad consequence, detrimental effect.’’ Therefore, ‘‘I have no *doṣa*’’ becomes ‘‘I can not fail.’’

[11] To cite but a few characteristic examples from the *Yuktiṣaṣṭikā*: ‘‘It is strange indeed that exponents of universal impermanence, those who follow the Buddha's path, should cling to things by quarreling. When, on close inspection, neither ‘‘this’’ nor ‘‘that’’ can be found, what wise man will argue for the truth of either?’’ *(/sangs rgyas lam la brten nas ni//kun la mi rtag smra ba rnams// rtsod pas dngos rnams mchog gzung bas//gnas pa gang yin de rmad do/[41]/'di 'am de 'o zhes gang du//rnam par dpyad nas mi dmigs na//rtsod pas 'di 'am de bden zhes//mkhas pa su zhig smra bar 'gyur/*[42] [Lindtner (1987 rep): 112]). Again: ‘‘Convinced that impermanent things are like the moon's reflection in water, neither true nor false, one is not carried away by philosophical views’’ *(/gang dag brten nas dngos po rnams//chu yi zla ba lta bur ni//yang dag ma yin log min par//'dod pa de dag bltas mi 'phrog/*[45] [Ibid: 114]). And again: ‘‘Great men have no position and therefore no quarrel; for those who have no position, where is the opposing position? In taking any stand whatsoever one is seized by the writhing snakes of emotional attachment. They alone are free, whose mind has no place to stand’’ *(/che ba'i bdag nyid can de dag//rnams la phyogs med rtsod pa med//gang rnams la ni phyogs med pa//de la gzhan phyogs ga la yod/(50)/gang yang rung ba'i gnas rnyed nas//nyon mongs sbrul gdug gyo can gyis//zin par gyur te gang gi sems//gnas med de dag zin mi 'gyur/*[51] [Ibid.: 114–116]).

One could hardly avoid encountering forms of this rejection of all views in any examination of "the textual evidence." In fact Hayes cites the closing verse of the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*-s (MMK), where Nāgārjuna pays homage to the Buddha:

> I prostrate before Gautama, who, after experiencing compassion, taught the true virtue in order to dispel all opinions (*dṛṣṭi*-s).[12]

After acknowledging that "some appreciation" of the meaning of *dṛṣṭi* ("view" or, in Hayes' translation, "opinion") is crucial to an understanding of Nāgārjuna's thought (1994: 302), he points out that the term is "virtually devoid of any constant meaning" (ibid.). The only thing we can know for sure is that it has "undesirable overtones" (ibid.: 303). Then, in the very next sentence, he seems abruptly to change his mind: "Fortunately, it is not too difficult to discover what Nāgārjuna means by the term 'opinion (*dṛṣṭi*).'" Since the final chapter of MMK discusses and rejects various views of the self, Hayes concludes that the reference to "all *dṛṣṭi*-s" in the closing stanza can safely be glossed as "[all] opinions [or views] that presuppose that one has some definite personal identity" (ibid. 304). It then follows, presumably (this is nowhere actually spelled out), that chief among the "definitely stated doctrines" Nāgārjuna is interested in defending is the so-called "doctrine of no-self." In this way Nāgārjuna's radical rejection of all views is quickly and effectively reduced, first, to a rejection of one particular view (the view that one has some definite personal identity) and then, through an unstated inference, to the defense of yet another particular view or "doctrine" (the view/doctrine of no-self). Hayes is now free to move on to what most interests him — a logical analysis of the rational arguments deployed by Nāgārjuna in his efforts to promote this doctrine.

It is no mere coincidence that Hayes' attempt at scientific detachment is brought to bear through a logical analysis of Nāgārjuna's language. The appeal to logic carries with it a certain flavor of truth that is considerably older and more widespread than any modern assertion of scientific or historical objectivity. In this respect there is no doubt that Hayes' concerns, and much of his method, do in fact have an Indian pedigree, for one cannot help but be struck by the similarities between, on the one hand, Hayes, Tillemans, and Garfield, and on the other, Bhāvaviveka, one of Nāgārjuna's earliest and most influential commentators. Both the modern commentators and Bhāvaviveka are preoccupied with logical analysis, and both assume that it is possible to reduce Nāgārjuna's rich and subtly nuanced writing to "a set of definitely stated doctrines for which he was trying to produce a systematically arranged set of rational arguments" without sacrificing anything of literary or metaphorical value. Once this premise is in place, it is relatively unimportant whether — like Garfield and Bhāvaviveka — one is convinced that he has succeeded in vindicating Nāgārjuna the logician, or — like Hayes and

[12] *sarvadṛ ṭiprahāṇāya yaḥ saddharmam adeśayat/anukampām upādāya taṁ namasyāmi gautamam//*(XXVII.30) The translation here is Hayes' own.

Robinson — one is persuaded that Nāgārjuna's logical "trick" is little more than a curious historical artifact, the anachronistic vestige of a time and place less sophisticated than our own. Either way, the conclusion follows directly on the heals of the premise around which it is framed.

I have elsewhere suggested an alternative way of reading Nāgārjuna, one not grounded in the compulsive search for objective, rational certainty (Huntington 1995). In what follows I shall not attempt either to attack or to defend Nāgārjuna's "arguments" by producing an alternative set of even more persuasive logical formulae, but rather I shall suggest that this approach to the *Madhyamakakārikā*-s is steeped in a set of preoccupations that violate the spirit of the text as it was understood by yet another of Nāgārjuna's ancient commentators. Like Robinson and Hayes, I insist that my interest here is primarily historical: I believe that the compulsion experienced by so many of Nāgārjuna's modern readers — to force a logical grid over the work of a writer who is so obviously and profoundly distrustful of logic — derives, to a considerable extent, from a skewed understanding of the intellectual history of Indian Buddhism. In the balance of this paper I shall trace the source of this contemporary preoccupation with logical analysis back to the early centuries of the common era, and show how the need for a logical reading of Nāgārjuna is historically bound up with the desire to find a place for his writing in a tradition of doxography that moved from India into Tibet.[13] I shall further suggest that our best efforts to understand Nāgārjuna historically, in the context of his own time, have thus far been hampered by an inability to free ourselves from the vocabulary, values and presuppositions of this same doxographic tradition — a tradition that perhaps epitomizes what Paul Feyerabend had in mind when he cautioned against "systematic attempts at education." I will close by offering what I take to be a more congenial interpretation of Nāgārjuna's work — a reading not based on any desire to "command rational assent," a reading that sets his obvious abhorrence of *all* "definitely stated doctrines" and "true conclusions" at center stage, where it belongs.

II

The modern compulsion to read Nāgārjuna through the lens of symbolic logic is, in one important (and perhaps ironic) respect, the end result of a long and complex scholastic enterprise, a construct of the religious imagination that proves, on closer inspection, to embody its own socio-political agenda. The thread of this idea can be traced backwards from contemporary academic discourse to 15th century Tibet, and from there into India, where we uncover the roots of a hermeneutical strategy that served to create and maintain the

[13] Cf. Huntington (2003). The present essay is in several respects an extension of the arguments presented in that earlier paper.

orthodox belief in a continuous, unbroken transmission of the Buddha's own teaching, the single, unchanging Truth.

In one of the oldest extant scriptures of the Pāli canon, the *Sutta Nipāta*, we come across a rudimentary assertion of the ideal:

> Truth is indeed one and the knower of it does not dispute it. There is not a second [view] (884) (Saddhatissa 1985: 104).[14]

And yet if this assertion is to be taken seriously at face value (and all the evidence suggests that it was taken very seriously by the majority of those responsible for assembling the canonical literature) then there are obvious hermeneutical problems to be overcome in reconciling any number of apparently contradictory statements attributed to the Buddha in the scriptures as a whole. In composing the tradition's earliest formal exegetical commentaries, the men who composed the *abhidharma* were the first to confront the difficulty directly. Referring to the central doctrine of the four noble truths, the *Vibhāsa* frames the relevant question in unambiguous terms:

> If there are four truths, why then did the Blessed One say that there is only one? (De la Vallée Poussin 1937: 161)

The Indian tradition seems almost from the outset to have incorporated two distinct, but seemingly incompatible, responses to this question.

The first of these two, evidence for which may be found in the earliest strata of the Pāli sources, may be understood as a version of Jamesian pragmatism:[15] The cash value of truth is a strict function of its soteriological efficacy; therefore, the single truth is the truth that brings spiritual liberation, which is found when one ceases to need, or desire, certainty of the sort provided by fixed views. Not surprisingly, what is true in this sense for one person is not necessarily true for another.[16] The *Kalama Sutta* tells us to "reject any doctrine when you yourself realize that its acceptance leads to misfortune and suffering" (*Aṅguttara Nikāya*, II.191). To insist on any single articulation of truth as final is, from this perspective, like insisting that everyone must accept a particular theory of bike-riding rather than simply mastering the activities of balancing, peddling, steering, and so forth. It is, in other words, to fail to see that what is called for is not belief, but rather, a kind of practical skill; specifically, the capacity for non-clinging.

The *Sutta Nipāta* is replete with passages suggesting precisely this. For example: "He who is attached enters into debate about doctrines. By what and

[14] Cf. Halbfass (1988: ch. 19) for an interesting discussion of the Indian tendency to view truth as "one" and "hierarchical".

[15] As far as I know, De la Vallée Poussin (1913: 129) was the first to use the word "pragmatic" with reference to these passages: "Nous avons defini l'ancienne dogmatique comme une doctrine essentiellement 'pragmatique'..."

[16] There is some reason to believe that this "practical" understanding might be more ancient than the theoretical approach described below: See Vetter (1988: 41ff). I am inclined to believe, for reasons that will become apparent in what follows, that this was the oldest interpretive strategy brought to bear on the Buddha's teaching, one that predates the necessity to speak of a Buddhist tradition.

how can an unattached person be characterized? He has nothing to grasp or reject; he has purified all views here itself'' (Saddhatissa 1985: 92, verse 787). Again: ''They do not speculate, they do not esteem any views and say 'This is the highest purity'. They release the knot of dogmatic clinging and do not long for anything in the world'' (ibid.: 94, verse 794). Once again, defining the qualities of a Sage (a *muni*, or Silent One): ''He has no longing for the future and no grief for the past; there are no views or opinions that lead him'' (ibid.: 100, verse 851). This is no doubt why, in the *Majjhima Nikāya* (I.431), when the Buddha was asked questions that implicitly required a definitive, binding answer he responded with silence: ''They were not practical, not related to what is fundamental to the spiritual life, not conducive to *nibbidāya*, dispassion, cessation, peace, higher knowledge, awakening or *nibbāna*.'' The parable of the poison arrow (ibid.: I.429) suggests a similar perspective on truth: To become attached to the desire for a particular doctrinal formulation of the truth is to become mired in abstraction; as if a man wounded by an arrow would not have it removed until he knew the name of its maker, the material from which it was crafted, and who shot it. A second parable — the famous parable of the raft — carries a similar message: ''I preach a doctrine (*dhamma*) comparable to a raft, useful for crossing over but not to be clung to... Those who understand [my] doctrine to be like a raft should discard it as well, to say nothing of what is not [my] doctrine (*adhamma*)...'' (ibid. I.134). When clinging is the problem, any actual doctrine is potentially dispensable, for the simple reason that all doctrinal statements are of exclusively pragmatic value. In all of this, we find a clear and demonstrable historical precedent to Nāgārjuna's thoroughgoing rejection of all doctrines, views, arguments, and proofs.[17]

To assume that the radical version of this spiritual pragmatism can be reconciled with an essentially metaphysical doctrine of truth as ''one without a second'' without violating its integrity is, at the least, problematic, and I shall have a bit more to say on the subject below. As a matter of historical fact, however, this early response to the problem of reconciling various apparently conflicting truth claims within the Buddha's teaching was soon absorbed into the canonical literature and assigned its place in the orthodox hierarchy of doctrine by a powerful and profoundly theoretical approach to truth that came to dominate textual exegesis in India and later, with certain important modifications, in Tibet.

The *Vibhāsa's* rhetorical question, cited above, takes for granted that the various statements attributed to the Buddha can and must be reconciled. The means for such a reconciliation was found in a hermeneutical distinction, present in the Pāli *sutta*-s and throughout the Mahāyāna corpus, between two kinds of discourse: On the one hand, isolated expressions or entire passages with a ''direct meaning'' (*nītattha*/*nītārtha*) in which the single truth is manifestly or literally present; and on the other hand, expressions or passages with

[17] For a detailed presentation of the evidence supporting this claim with respect to the *Sutta Nipāta*, see Gomez (1976).

an "indirect meaning" (*neyyattha*/*neyārtha*). In other words, language in which the single truth is not immediately available and must therefore be accessed by the application of interpretive principles sanctioned by the canons of orthodox exegesis:

> There are these two who misrepresent the Tathāgata. Which two? He who represents a scripture of indirect meaning as a scripture of direct meaning and he who represents a scripture of direct meaning as a scripture of indirect meaning. (*Aṅguttara Nikāya*, I.60)

Although the terms "direct" and "indirect" already presuppose some kind of value hierarchy (Jayatilleke 1963: 361ff.), it is possible that in the beginning this distinction may have been intended simply to point out that there were "expressions, turns of speech, designations in common use in the world which the Tathāgata makes use of without being led astray by them" (*Dīgha Nikāya*, I.202). Whatever the case, the primary appeal of the *nītārtha*/*neyārtha* analysis as a hermeneutical tool was its power to act as the critical judgment necessary in order to measure specific doctrinal statements against the ideal of a single truth.[18] This was accomplished by the systematic reconciliation of all apparent discrepancies and incoherencies among doctrinal statements. In accomplishing this task the same hermeneutical strategy served to weave together various disparate doctrinal threads into the fabric of a continuous historical tradition wherein the single truth could be seen to unfold. No matter if the fabric of tradition is every bit as abstract and ideal as the unitary truth which it is supposed to preserve and reveal; it could not be otherwise, for if the incoherencies were treated as anything other than apparent — that is, if all the various specific doctrinal formulations could not in the final analysis be reconciled — then it would no longer be possible to maintain the idealized construct of an unbroken tradition.

One always begins with a presupposition — what has been recognized, since Heidegger, as a "pre-understanding" — and from there moves through a process of interpretation to confirm precisely what it was that one already knew in an indistinct, inarticulate way. If the early Ābhidhārmika-s found themselves linked to the Buddha through an unbroken tradition then it was only because as pious Buddhists they had known all along that such a tradition must be present. Nor is there any question of relativism at this level. We are dealing here with the ontology of understanding, an existential/hermeneutic circle that defines both knowledge and existence; for only in the rigorous, often painful working out of what is always already given as true do we find ourselves in a particular situation embodying a particular range of possibilities.

[18] This "single truth" is found in the Word of the Buddha (*buddhavacana*), or — alternatively — the Intent of the Buddha, which includes his silence, as for example his refusal to answer questions about the fourteen *avyākṛtavastūni*. Cf. also Candrakīrti's references to "the silence of the sages" (e.g. *Prasannapadā* XIX.25), as well as the silence of one who, under pressure of the Madhyamaka critique, is rendered speechless because his views no longer appear coherent.

In the present case of an exegetical distinction between direct and indirect meaning the ensuing relationship between hermeneutics and ontology is not difficult to trace. The *nītārtha*/*neyārtha* scheme was the clear expression of a coherence theory of truth, which has been paraphrased as follows: "If someone makes a series of statements on a particular matter it is important that they should all point in the same general direction, or rather that they should cohere. Someone whose statements do not meet this condition may be dismissed as someone who does not expound a unitary truth" (Harris 1991: 84). The ontological commitment embodied in this theory was first made explicit in the early commentaries with the specification of a distinction apparently not recognized in the Pāli *sutta*-s between "the truth of the highest meaning" (*pāramārthasatya*) and "the truth of conventional affairs" (*saṁvṛtisatya*):

> The Perfectly Awakened One, the best of teachers, spoke two truths: one conventional, and one of the highest meaning. One can not find any third. A conventional statement is true because of worldly convention; a statement of the highest meaning is true as [the expression of] the real characteristics of things.[19]

The value hierarchy implicit in the original *nītārtha*/*neyārtha* hermeneutic is here preserved and mapped onto an ontological landscape where the effort is still to reconcile apparent contradiction; the critical difference being that in this case the reconciliation is to take place in strictly metaphysical or ontological terms. When exactly the shift from a concern with doctrinal statements to a concern with ontology occurred we will probably never know, but it is clear that such a shift is taken for granted in ābhidharmic exegesis, where the two truths are now linked to a correspondence theory of truth. In the *Vibhāsa* we find the highest truth identified with reality (*tattva*) and the world as it exists (*yathābhūtam*) (cf. Harris 1991: 90).

> In other words, one ontological truth (i.e. reality [*tattva*]) gives rise to two epistemic truths, i.e. the conventional (*saṁvṛti*) and the ultimate (*pāramārtha*). The Buddhist teaching (*dharma*) is itself a body of disparate doctrines such as the four noble truths, the theory of *dharma*-s, the three marks of existence, etc. which cohere into an overall picture with the explicit intention of providing an antidote to the conventional way of seeing things. It eventually leads to the realization of ultimate truth. The dharma then, while it may appear contradictory to a

[19] These lines appear in two places: In a commentary on the *Kathāvatthu* and in a commentary on the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* (cf. Jayatilleke 1963: 363 where the text is quoted and discussed). The fact that they do not appear in the *sutta*-s seems to be a further indication of a historical move away from the soteriological pragmatism of, e.g., the *Sutta Nipāta*, and toward an orthodox commitment to the ideal of a Buddhist tradition.

> superficial examination, in fact has a coherent unity which points toward the true nature of reality. (Ibid.: 91)

Judging from references in Candrakīrti's *Prasannapadā*,[20] by the time of the fifth century the process was probably long since complete: Just as the (single) ideal essence of the Buddha's teaching is present both explicitly (*nītārtha*) and implicitly (*neyārtha*) in multiple doctrinal statements, so ultimate reality itself is directly present at the highest level (*pāramārtha*) and only indirectly (metaphorically) accessible at the level of convention (*saṁvṛti*). Once this hermeneutical scheme was in place there was no avoiding it or its metaphysical implications. From then on to speak as a Buddhist, from within the orthodox tradition, meant, in the most primary sense, to perform one's exegetical work with these particular linguistic/conceptual tools.

III

According to the account of the ‘‘Council of Rajagṛha’’ recorded in the *Cullavagga*,[21] the first concern of the monastic community after the Buddha's death was to determine a fixed canon that would provide, in the absence of the Master, the source for all orthodox doctrine. The canon is fundamental to a religious tradition for it defines, within very specific parameters, what the community of believers will talk about and — to an equal extent — *how* they will talk. The Word of the Buddha was preserved in the *sūtra*-s, but the *sūtra*-s themselves incorporated no binding strictures that would govern their interpretation. What was required was not only a canon but a canonization of intent which would isolate and systematically organize those passages of scripture where the direct meaning of the Buddha's teaching could be found. The process of systematization began very early with recitation of certain cryptic formulae (*mātṛka*) which captured the essence of the doctrine.[22] Over time these formulae seem to have generated their own systematic commentaries which were gathered together and canonized, significantly, as the ‘‘Higher Doctrine’’ or Abhidharma. The Abhidharma texts entered the early canon as a formal distillation of the *sūtra*-s and themselves became the authorized source for a burgeoning commentarial tradition that makes up the earliest corpus of Buddhist philosophical literature. Not surprisingly this literature shows a virtual obsession with the distinction between ‘‘direct’’ and ‘‘indirect’’ meaning, and technical terminology expressive of this distinction multiplied rapidly.[23]

[20] See Harris (1991: 87) for a discussion of the relevant passages.

[21] See the discussion of this material in De la Vallée Poussin (1976: 2).

[22] Warder (1970: 10–11 & 220ff.) still provides one of the best reviews of the Pāli materials dealing with this topic.

[23] Cf. the interesting discussion of these terms in Ruegg (1989: 297ff).

The first five centuries of the common era were an astonishingly productive time in the history of Buddhist thought. Buddhism had become a powerful social and intellectual force in India, and Buddhist exegetes were in constant conversation not only with each other but also with intellectuals speaking from a variety of perspectives. These were years of extreme creativity, arguably the single most fertile period in the long history of Indian Buddhist thought; new systems of metaphysics, epistemology and logic abounded. This was also a time of grave danger — a danger which can not be overestimated — for the Buddhist community was finding it more and more difficult to define any fixed parameters for acceptable doctrine and practice. The authors of these new systems were vitally concerned with the exegetical project of grounding their ideas in the canonical scriptures, but two significant developments now threatened to subvert this project and, worse, to jeopardize the very ideal of an orthodox tradition by exploding the canon into an unmanageable chaos of competing interests.

First of all there was the serious problem posed by the proliferation of new scriptures purporting to contain the actual Word of the Buddha (cf. Williams 1989: 37–42). Many — perhaps most — of the new Mahāyāna texts claiming to be the actual Word of the Buddha belonged to a single genre called the *Prajñāpāramitāsūtra*-s, or (in Conze's translation) the *Scriptures on Perfect Wisdom*. This literature was not only revolutionary in its assertion of scriptural authenticity; the ideas promulgated there were themselves subversive. The *Prajñāpāramitāhṛdayasūtra* (or Heart Sūtra) is typical of this literature in its overt repudiation of the earlier tradition's fundamental doctrines. Under the scrutiny of this new "wisdom" virtually the entire Buddhist catechism of the day — including the four noble truths, dependent origination, and the ultimate goal of *nirvāna* –- evaporates into the void. And when the eye of perfect wisdom is turned back on itself...

> No wisdom can we get hold of, no highest perfection,
> No Bodhisattva, no thought of enlightenment either.
> When told of this, if not bewildered and in no way anxious
> A Bodhisattva courses in the Well-Gone's wisdom.
> (Williams 1989: 48)

The literature makes a great deal of the obstacles to acceptance of this radical form of "Perfect Wisdom:"

> And yet, O Lord, if, when this is pointed out, a Bodhisattva's heart does not become cowed, nor stolid, does not despair nor despond, if he does not turn away or become dejected, does not tremble, is not frightened or terrified, it is just this Bodhisattva, this great being who should be instructed in perfect wisdom. (ibid.)

In the *Vajracchedikāsūtra* we are told that those who hear of perfect wisdom and do not become terrified "will be possessed by the greatest astonishment" (Schopen 1989: 124). As Williams (1989: 48) observes, "It is difficult for us to

appreciate just how extraordinary these teachings are as religious teachings, and how disturbing they must have seemed to anyone who took them seriously at the time they were first promulgated.'' Schopen (1989: 135) seems to concur: ''This repeated emphasis on fear, terror and dread in connection with hearing the Perfection of Wisdom being taught or explained would seem to indicate that the authors of our texts were clearly aware of the fact that what they were presenting was above all else potentially terrifying and awful, and that a predictable reaction to it was fear. And, although these passages need to be studied further, they already give us some valuable information on the nature of the experience with which this literature is dealing.'' The usual modern interpretation suggests that such passages convey a message of non-clinging and renunciation involving the surrender of attachment to all self-interest. What is especially important, for present purposes, is that this message entailed not only a sort of generalized existential non-clinging, but a very specific practice of renunciation directed squarely at the orthodox tradition. The reader of the *Prajñāpāramitā* is encouraged, in no uncertain terms, to cease clinging to every form of Buddhist doctrine — including any new doctrines or ideas articulated in these scriptures.

No less ominous in the long run, was the appearance during this same period of influential philosophers like Vasubandhu and Dignāga, whose radical interpretations of the ancient teachings had themselves assumed a quazi-scriptural authority among certain segments of the scholarly community. The most revolutionary among these new Buddhists was certainly the philosopher Nāgārjuna, who probably lived sometime during the first century CE.[24] Nāgārjuna's writing preserves the earliest and most extensive interpretation of the *Prajñāpāramitā* literature. Not surprisingly, a good deal of the conversation during this period turned increasingly on exegetical interpretation of the writings of these men and on the effort to marshal their words not simply under the old rubrics of ''direct'' and ''indirect'' meaning but also, increasingly, under terms suggestive of a single veiled intent that was presumed to be in operation behind the bewildering variety of views, opinions and approaches to practice.[25]

The threat of anarchy was decisively contained in the sixth century CE with the work of a single brilliant individual. Bhāvaviveka (c. 500–570?) was the first great Buddhist doxographer, a quintessentially orthodox scholar who devoted his considerable gifts to the task of making peace in the Buddhist

[24] On the dating of Nāgārjuna, see Ruegg (1981: 4–5).

[25] This hidden intent or motivation corresponded with the essential core of truth at the heart of the tradition. Cabezón (1990: 14: note 27) provides some useful references on the subject. Also see Ruegg (1989: 302ff) on ''the unexpressed but intended ground'' (*dgons gzhi* = **abhipreta-vastu*) and ''the pragmatic purpose'' (*dgos pa* = *prayojana*). Here the distinction is explicitly defined in terms of a metaphysical split between the ''emptiness'' of all appearances and the practical (soteriological) efficacy of the doctrines through which this emptiness is communicated.

world of his era by erecting a hermeneutical canopy large enough to shelter every potential renegade.[26] Under cover of his writing the intellectual *saṅgha* could be organized into schools and within these schools each would know, first of all, that he was a Buddhist, and second, precisely where his ideas fit into the hierarchy of meaning that culminated in the ''ultimate intention of the Buddha'' (cf. Ruegg 1985, 1988; Broido 1985). Seen in this light Bhāvaviveka's *Tarkajvālā* is much more than an exegetical or pedagogical treatise; it is an immensely sophisticated attempt to define a philosophical canon that would serve to contain the threatened disintegration of the intellectual community by assembling the myriad fragmentary, competing doctrines into an all-encompassing system of ''normative ideology'' (Cabezón 1990: 25).[27] The measure of Bhāvaviveka's success in this endeavor is evident not only from the status his work achieved among subsequent Buddhist scholars, but also from the fact that among Western academics the *Tarkajvālā* is generally recognized as the progenitor of an entire genre of doxological literature in India and, eventually, in Tibet, where from the ninth century on Buddhist converts experienced their own acute need to give definitive shape to the orthodox Indian tradition.[28]

The Tibetan word for ''Buddhist'' is *nang pa* — ''Insider'' — an expression which makes explicit the idealized vision of tradition that had existed in India ever since the time when exegetes first became concerned with the line from the *Sutta Nipāta* about ''one truth without a second.'' The orthodox Buddhist is by definition a person who lives and thinks within the realm of this one truth, a realm that was circumscribed in various ways, from reports of the closing of the canon of Buddha-Word at the first council to the closing of the philosophical canon in the doxographical treatises of Bhāvaviveka and the others who followed his lead (cf. Cabezón 1990: 13–14). Among Tibetans, where scholastic taxonomy attained unprecedented heights through the medium of the *grub mtha'* literature, virtually every educated lama is at least a de facto doxographer.

Grub mtha' (Sanskrit *siddhānta*) means, literally, the end or extreme (*mtha'*) of what is established (*grub*). It signifies by extension any tenet characteristic and in some way definitive of a particular fixed doctrinal

[26] Cf. Ruegg (1981: 61) for Bhāvaviveka's dates. Also the comments of Qvarnstrom (1989: 99): ''As a doxographer, Bhavya actually initiated the genre of comprehensive histories of philosophy in Buddhism...'' See Huntington (2003) for a detailed discussion of Bhāvaviveka's role as the initiator of the doxographical tradition, and its impact on the interpretation of Nāgārjuna's writing.

[27] Cf. also Cabezón (1990: 21): ''...we might say that what we have been considering thus far has been only a simplified model of the process of philosophical canonization, one in which the *siddhānta* system was taken as a given... The philosophical canon is considered, as it were, the distillation of the textual canon.''

[28] On Indian models, see Cabezón (1990: 13) and Lopez (1987: 29–30 & 439: note 38). Cabezón (1990: 10: note 9) also comments on the similarities between Tibetan *grub mtha'* literature and the *p'an chiao* hermeneutics of Chinese Buddhism.

position. In this sense the word serves as the generic cover-term for a full range of technical terminology, including any philosophical view (*dṛṣṭi*), thesis (*pakṣa*) or proposition (*pratijñā*). The expression is also routinely applied to a genre of scholastic literature in which such tenets, doctrines or philosophical views are expounded (Mimaki 1982: 2). The basic meaning of the expression is made clear, for example, in the introduction to an 18th century *grub mtha'* manual, the *Grub pa'i mtha'i rnam par bzhag pa rin po che'i phreng ba*:

> The etymology for 'tenet' (*siddhānta*) is: a tenet [literally, an established conclusion] is a meaning which was made firm, decided upon, or established in reliance on scripture and/or reasoning and which will not be forsaken for something else... "'Established conclusion' [tenet] signifies one's own established assertion which is thoroughly borne out by scripture and reasoning. Because one will not pass beyond this assertion, it is a conclusion." (Hopkins and Sopa 1976: 53–54; the citation is from Dharmamitra)[29]

This same manual informs us that "there are two types of persons: those whose minds have not been affected by tenets and those whose minds have been affected by tenets. Those whose minds have not been affected by tenets seek only the pleasures of this life..." (ibid.: 53) Obviously, it is of primary importance to have "a mind affected by tenets." That is, one needs first of all "to have studied some system of tenets" (ibid.) and to hold to some "established conclusion/assertion" that one "will not pass beyond". The alternative is a sort of brutish, unreflective existence characteristic of the untrained mind. But to be an Insider (i.e. a Buddhist) one must not simply hold to just any doctrine or view, one must be "a proponent of specific tenets" (Hopkins 1983: 319).[30] In the context of a useful article on *grub mtha'* literature, José Cabezón furnishes a thumbnail sketch of the basic principles involved:

> Religious systems are divided into two: Buddhist and non-Buddhist. The former are in turn subdivided into four major [Indian] schools, Vaibhā ika, Sautrāntika, Yogācāra (or Cittamātra) and Madhyamaka, schools that were distinguished from one another on the basis of their philosophical tenets. Each of these schools is then divided into further subschools. It should be realized, moreover, that the order of the schools in the schema is not arbitrary but is believed to represent an ascending

[29] *dKon mchog 'jigs med dbang po, Grub pa'i mtha'i i rnam pa bzhag pa rin po che'i phreng ba* (no date: 4): *grub pa'i mtha ste/rigs pa'i lung gis rab tu bstan par rang gi 'dod pa grub pa ni/de las phar yang 'dro ba med pas na mtho/zhes gsungs pa ltar lung rigs gang rung la rten nas thag bcad cing grub pa 'am dam bcas pa'i don de nyid rang gi blo ngor tshul de las gzhan du 'dod pa med pas na/*

[30] There seems to be some allowance made for those unable to cultivate a more sophisticated view; they can become Insiders merely by taking refuge in the "three jewels": the Buddha, the Buddhist Doctrine, and the monastic community (See Hopkins and Sopa 1976: 54). For the unreflective it is apparently sufficient simply to have strong faith in the orthodox doctrine.

> hierarchy of successively more subtle and accurate philosophical positions, positions that, according to most Tibetan exegetes, culminate in the views of the Madhyamaka school. (Cabezón 1990: 10–11)

The final word on the matter is provided by Jeffrey Hopkins in his *Meditation on Emptiness*:

> In general, non-Buddhists are called 'other sectarians' because they are followers of sects other than those of the Buddhists. They are called 'outsiders' because they are outside of the correct view of emptiness. (Hopkins 1983: 32)

It is important to note that "the correct view of emptiness" mentioned here is specifically associated with what had originally been defined by Bhāvaviveka centuries earlier, in India, as the view set forth in the Madhyamaka school founded by Nāgārjuna (Huntington 2003: 74–75). This "view" (*dṛṣṭi/lta ba*) is said to be of "direct meaning" (*neyārtha*) and is therefore identified with the Buddha's ultimate purport (Cabezón 1990: 15), which had as well long since been recognized within the exegetical tradition as the one ultimate truth taught by the Buddha. Just as this absolute truth, the single essence of the Dharma, infuses and upholds the manifold expressions of tradition, so its tropological referent, the metaphysical essence of reality, infuses and upholds the conventional world.

Here is where contemporary logicians like Robinson, Hayes, Tillimans, and Garfield find tacit historical justification for their operating premise, namely, that "Nāgārjuna had a set of definitely stated doctrines for which he was trying to produce a systematically arranged set of rational arguments" (Hayes 1994: 363). Such a premise need not be questioned — even in the light of Nāgārjuna's own apparent insistence to the contrary — in part because it has received the imprimatur of the full doxographic tradition dating back to Bhāvaviveka in sixth century India. The assumption that Nāgārjuna is attempting to "command rational assent" for a "true conclusion" is not confined merely to logicians like those I have been discussing. The influence of this orthodox understanding of early Indian Madhyamaka is everywhere visible in the secondary literature of contemporary academic discourse, where it has been absorbed under the rubric of "Indo-Tibetan Buddhism." The very expression itself — our own neologism — has meaning only against the backdrop of a hierarchical, scholastic taxonomy made up of "definitely stated doctrines" and "systematically arranged set[s] of rational arguments." Compare, for instance, Paul Williams (1991: 200): "There is such a thing as the Madhyamaka viewpoint, it is the correct viewpoint which sees things the way they really are..." Or Cabezón (1992: 137): "Specifically, the Prāsaṅgika Mādhyamika represents the highest philosophical view because it sets forth the only unequivocally true and complete theory of the nature of reality." Examples like this could

be multiplied indefinitely.[31] It is important to note that such remarks are presented without qualification; they are not framed as the orientation of a particular lineage of orthodox scholastic exegesis. In other words, we are dealing here not with a conclusion, an end-point subject to debate, but rather with a premise, a place from which subsequent argumentation may begin. And yet, when one sets these passages directly alongside Nāgārjuna's own unequivocal words in his *Madhyamakaśāstra* the effect is striking:

> The emptiness of the conquerors was taught in order to do away with all views. Therefore it is said that whoever makes a philosophical view out of ''emptiness'' is indeed lost.[32]

Once we postulate that ''Nāgārjuna had a set of definitely stated doctrines'' then we are compelled to further assume that ''he was trying to produce a systematically arranged set of rational arguments'' in support of these doctrines. This was the position endorsed by Bhāvaviveka, and it is built into the doxographic project which he initiated. I have written elsewhere in some detail about Bhāvaviveka's debt to the logician and epistemologist Dignāga (ca. 480–540), who provided the prototype for Bhāvaviveka's attempt to clarify what he saw as the implicit syllogistic structure of Nāgārjuna's arguments.[33] No doubt his work has provided a powerfully seductive historical precedent, and the orthodox pedigree in itself may be sufficient to explain the perennial appeal of this otherwise curious perspective. But there is a second explanation as well, an explanation first suggested by yet another early Indian commentator who was obviously disturbed by Bhavaviveka's efforts to foist a ''view'' on Nāgārjuna.

It is well known that Candrakīrti (ca. 600–650)[34] vehemently objected to Bhāvaviveka's logical method, on the grounds that it was a fundamental perversion of Nāgārjuna's project. Specifically, Candrakīrti maintained that the purpose of the *Madhyamakaśāstra* has nothing to do with ''commanding rational assent,'' with demonstrating, proving or disproving anything. Rather the goal is to uproot altogether the very desire, or need, for rational certainty, and so to provide an anecdote to the intellectual and spiritual disease of

[31] See, for example, Ruegg's discomfort with the literal meaning of VV 29 (*nāsti ca mama pratijñā*): ''Formally speaking, Nāgārjuna's statement 'I have no *pratijñā* may look to us like a (semantic) paradox... [I]t seems possible to understand it not as a first-order utterance in the object language but as a second-order metalinguistic one stipulating that none of the Mādhyamika's statements is to be taken as a thesis positing/presupposing/implying the existence of an entity having self-existence (*svabhāva*)'' (Ruegg 2003: 220). Elsewhere he refers to this heavily qualified reading of VV 29 as the ''standard Madhyamaka view'' (ibid., 240). Claus Oetke writes of Nāgārjuna's ''tenet of emptiness'' (Oetke 2003: 468) and of ''the original doctrine of the Madhyamaka,'' which is ''the outcome of intricate considerations, in particular those which have been formulated in the *Mūlamadhyamakakārikās* and which were meant to prove by rational means the tenet that there is no *svabhāva* of an entity of any sort'' (Ibid.: 460).

[32] *śūnyatā sarvadṛṣṭīnāṁ proktā niḥsaraṇam jinaiḥ/ye āṁ tu śūnyatā dṛṣṭis tān asādhyān babhāṣire//* (XIII.8)

[33] Cf. Huntington (2003).

[34] On Candrakīrti's dates, see Ruegg (1981: 71, note 228).

clinging. This is accomplished by uncovering a logically indeterminate space between proof and disproof, affirmation and negation, consent and dissent. Access to this ungrounded space is opened through a ''skillful'' application of the two truths discussed above. So-called ''rigorous analytic arguments'' function as an *upāya*, a soteriological device, or, alternatively (in the words of Bernard Faure, cited below), a ''spiritual exercise.''

Here is where the road forks: One way leads toward the promise of a true, rationally binding conclusion, the other to a state of non-abiding, a metaphorical place neither *on* nor *off* the map.

For a logician, to understand Nāgārjuna's use of reason as recourse to *upāya* is considered a mistake, for it ''minimizes the role and the seriousness of argumentation in the Madhyamaka system'' (Tillemans 1999: 190). But for Candrakīrti, to understand *upāya* as ''nothing but a psychological technique'' (*ibid.*) is to minimize the role and seriousness of what Michael Pye, in his richly documented study of the subject, has called ''the key to understanding Buddhism'' in the Mahāyāna (Pye 1978: 5).

According to Pye, ''It is beyond argument that insight (*prajñā*) and skilful [sic] means are most intimately related'' in the *prajñāpāramitā* literature (ibid.: 106). ''This stress on the close association of insight and skilful means is of great importance over against popular conceptions of the idea as being one of mere expediency'' (ibid.: 108). Far from being a mere technique, as the soteriological method par excellence of the Mahāyāna in general and the *prajñāpāramitā* in particular, one must consider the possibility that skillful means somehow lies at the heart of Nāgārjuna's denial of all views. Pye poses the question in this fashion: ''Is there perhaps some way of taking seriously their non-advancement of a position while at the same time indicating how their mode of going about these matters has definite significance?'' (ibid.: 117). In other words, instead of taking the arguments for emptiness as leading, ultimately, to a resting place — a view, position, or ''true conclusion'' — is there some way that we might focus our attention on the process of argumentation itself, on ''the nature and role of religious language'' as it functions *in the experience of the reader* (ibid.). From this perspective, skillful means may be understood as ''a kind of clue about the appropriate way to put into operation the religion which one has, that is, in the case of the Mahāyānists, Buddhism'' (ibid.). Skillful means is, then, not really a device used to make a point, but rather it is itself the end-point or goal of all religious striving. In this context, what appears as a commitment to rational argumentation is no more, or less, than that: *appearance*.

Reflecting on the two truths as a form of skillful means, Bernard Faure writes:

> ... this adoption of an absolute perspective expresses not so much a mystical experience as an act of faith regarding the reality of such a perspective. It authorizes a series of spiritual exercises, logical and epistemological permutations that, by encouraging the practitioner 'not to abide anywhere,' are supposed to enable him/her to accede to a higher

> plane. This entails a pragmatic decision for whoever seeks to pass beyond the level of conventional truth, in the same way as the principle of contradiction, far from constituting an absolute law, entails a pragmatic decision for whoever intends to remain at that level. (Faure 2004: 35)

Consider the following conversation between Candrakīrti and Bhāvaviveka, found in the *Prasannapadā*. Candrakīrti speaks first:

> If we allowed for any real certainty (*niścaya*) whatsoever then either it would have to arise from some valid means of knowledge or else it would not. But we do not allow for any certainty. How is that? There could be certainty if there were some possibility of uncertainty as its opposite. When we do not allow for any real uncertainty, however, then, in the absence of its opposite, how could there be certainty? [Discussion of certainty] without reference to its partner would be like [arguing whether] a donkey's horn is long or short...
>
> [Bhāvaviveka] If you allow for no certainty whatsoever, then why does your statement about things not arising from self, etc., appear to be certain?
>
> [Candrakīrti] this statement is certain for worldly people who interpret it in terms of arguments familiar to them. It is not certain for those with deep insight (*ārya*-s).
>
> [Bhāvaviveka] Do those with deep insight really have no conclusive argument (*upapatti:* proof, demonstrated conclusion)?
>
> [Candrakīrti] Who can say whether they do or they don't? For those with deep insight the truth of the highest meaning is a state of silence. This being so, how is there any possibility of discursive thinking out of which we might find either a conclusive argument or no real argument at all? (Huntington 2003: 77–78)[35]

Faure casts the ability to access this logically indeterminate ''higher plane'' as rooted in an initial act of faith. Ironically, perhaps, Karl Popper has said the same thing about the commitment to reason, when he ''recognizes the fact that the fundamental rationalist attitude *results from an (at least tentative) act*

[35] *Prasannapadā* (Vaidya 1960a: 19.16–29: *yadi kaścin niścayo nāmāsmākaṁ syāt, sa pramāṇajo vā syād apramāṇajo vā/na tvasti/kiṁ kāraṇam? ihā niścayasaṁbhave sati syāt tatpratipakṣas tadapekṣ o niścayaḥ/yadā tvaniścaya eva tāvad asmākaṁ nāsti, tadā kutas tadviruddhāviruddho niścayaḥ syāt saṁbandhyantaranirapek ṣatvāt, kharavi ṣāṁasya hrasvadīrghatāvat/[...] yadyevaṁ niścayo nāsti sarvataḥ, kathaṁ punar idaṁ niścitarūpaṁ vākyam upalabhyate bhavatām — na svato nāpi parato na dvābhyāṁ nāpyahetuto bhāvā bhavantīti? ucyate/niścitam idaṁ vākyaṁ lokasya svaprasiddhayaivopapattyā, nāryāṇām/kiṁ khalu āryāṇām upapattir nāsti? kenaitad uktam asti vā nāsti veti/ paramārtho hyāryāṇāṁ tūṣṇīṁbhāvaḥ/tataḥ kutas tatra prapañcasaṁbhavo yadupapattir anupapattir vā syāt?*

of faith — from faith in reason'' (Popper 1950, Vol. II: 231).[36] It might be more helpful, then, to refer in this context not so much to an act of faith, which suggests that assent to rational argumentation is itself not also governed by faith, but rather to an act of surrender. I mean a recognition of the limits of reason and a willingness to surrender to the groundless space below or beyond those limits, which are as well the limits of memory and imagination, of desire and fear. Such an act of surrender cannot ultimately take the form of a ''decision,'' pragmatic or otherwise, unless the very act of deciding to abandon attachment to reason is itself a sort of mystical experience. One way or another what both Faure and Candrakīrti are talking about clearly lies on the other side not only of the limits of rationality, but also of the limits defined by one's capacity to will, or even to desire what is by definition outside the scope of the imagination (*nirvikalpa*). Perhaps the only thing self-evident about moving away from the need for certainty (or attachment to belief, which is the same thing) and toward the ability ''not to abide anywhere'' is that the process is anything but formulaic. The spiritual exercises referred to by Faure are reflections of a profound silence uncontaminated by self-centered desire in any of its myriad subtle and not so subtle forms. When Candrakīrti goes so far as to say that Bhāvaviveka is not really a Mādhyamika at all, but rather a Logician (Tārkika) ''taking the side of the Madhyamaka school out of a desire to parade the extent of his own dialectical skill'' (Huntington 2003: 82), he is drawing attention not simply to the methodology of logical analysis but to the *motivation* of the Logician, who is driven not by selfless compassion but rather by a self-serving need for certainty rooted in rational conviction — a form of

[36] Popper's attitude in this matter is well known, and (I believe) uncontroversial. For an extended discussion of his views on the subject, see Herbert Keuth's excellent study, from which the following remarks are worth citing: ''Popper subdivides rationalism in the broad sense into 'critical rationalism' and uncritical rationalism' or 'comprehensive rationalism.' Uncritical rationalism adopts the *principle* 'that any assumption which cannot be supported either by argument or by experience is to be discarded.' This principle, however, is *inconsistent*, 'for since it cannot, in its turn, be supported by argument or by experience, it implies that is should itself be discarded.' Hence 'neither... argument nor experience can establish the rationalist attitude'; thus 'comprehensive rationalism' is untenable. Popper therefore advocates 'a modest and self-critical rationalism which recognizes certain limitations...' His critical rationalism 'frankly admits its origin in an irrational decision.' In a lecture given in 1960, he stresses that the rationalist demand to *justify* all assumptions is untenable'' (Keuth 2005: 240 [see the original text for full references to citations]). Cf. Faure (2004: 47): ''...even when the internal coherence of human reasoning appears to be beyond question in one particular field of thought, we should not be misled into thinking that reasoning as a whole is truly well founded. There is no way of proving that it is well founded, but neither is there any way of proving that it is erroneous. The idea that belief in reason is, in its very principle, irrational appeared as early as in the work of the Daoist thinker Zhuangzi... The circle of reason, like a magic circle, or what Buddhists call a *maṇḍala*, is subject to certain laws. Kant was one of those who traced out that circle on the ground, a circle out of which one could not step on pain of being ruled out of the game. So it was, after all, just a game! But outside the game, life goes on, although, short of a miracle, the players will never realize that.'' The chapter from which these remarks are lifted — titled ''Buddhism and Rationalities'' — provides a valuable anecdote to the compulsion to approach Nāgārjuna's writing as a logical tract.

clinging no less seductive now than it was some two thousand years ago in ancient India.[37]

IV

It is time to take stock. If, as it so happens, the attempt to make logical sense out of Nāgārjuna has its historical precedent in Bhāvaviveka, then surely the insistence that such a reading entirely misses the point finds its own precedent in Candrakīrti. The real issue here is not about who is the legitimate historian, but simply: Whose reading is most persuasive, most interesting, most cogent and engaging? ''What is to be avoided,'' Tillemans (1990: 17) has wisely observed, ''is a certain type of stultifying narrowness in the name of 'history' or 'philology'.''

Once we dispense with all attempts to secure a priori privilege for one or another reading of Nāgārjuna by linking it to claims about some kind of inherent methodological purity, the way is open to adjudicate any particular interpretation of his writing strictly on its own merits. It seems to me that the most serious shortcoming of this insistence on reducing the *Madhyamakārikā*-s to a series of logical formulas is that such a reading lacks any sensitivity for the very features of textuality — symbol, metaphor, polysemy, multivalence — that might lead us (à la Candrakīrti) out of the compulsive desire to deal in certainties. In other words, this way of reading denies to the text its existence as a *literary* work, and in doing so it allows us to forget — or never to see — that ''truth is in the act, not the content, of reading'' (Humphries 1999: 41)...

> To the extent that we insist, to ourselves or in critical practice, that texts refer to specific material and objective truths, and do not admit the emptiness of these, we defeat this aspect of reading, and fall into reification. To the extent that we read texts as collections of signs that can take the shapes and assume the importance of realities when we read, we directly experience the nature of emptiness, just as we do in dreams. As we realize that texts exist as literature only in the moment of reading, in the same instant in which we come into being with them as readers, we gain a direct experience of the nature of mind according to the Middle Way: the mind is nowhere to be found, neither any one of its parts nor exactly their sum. (ibid.: 45)

Faure (2004: 48) makes a similar point:

> Western thought (that is to say, rational thought, logical philosophy) asserts itself through confrontation, in accordance with the principle of

[37] Cf. his remarks in the *Prasannapadā* (Vaidya 1960a: 11, line 22) and *Madhyamakaśāsta* XXVII.30 (Vaidya 1960a: 258) where Nāgārjuna acknowledges that Gautama was motivated by compassion (*anukampa*) in his efforts to dispel all views. It is in this sense that the Buddha is presented not as a philosopher or a preacher interested in compelling either rational assent or belief, but rather as a physician concerned with healing dis-ease (*duḥkha*) rooted in clinging.

> the excluded middle. By so doing, it casts into outer darkness a number of human realities such as imagination, dreaming, literature, and myth, and – last, but not least – the ''thought from/of the outside,'' for instance ritual thought. These various domains, allegedly irrational, are the ones that Buddhist rationality will enable us to explore – without however, entirely leaving our own philosophical ''preserve.''

The systematic lexicon of this desire, or need for certainty (what Faure refers to here as ''Western thought,'' registered in words like ''command'' and ''demonstrate'') works to obscure not only the textuality of the materials we are studying, but its own tropological implications as well. Let me suggest just one fertile example.

Following Robinson's lead, in his zeal to expose ''the nature of the Mādhyamika trick'' Hayes (1994: 324) compares Nāgārjuna's writing to a trompe-l'œil, and yet he is apparently blind to the nuances of his own extraordinarily provocative simile. A more finely tuned appreciation of the peculiar aesthetics of this genre of painting might have led in quite a different direction, for there are tricks to be dispensed with, and then again, there are tricks from which one might learn something exceedingly valuable about the medium in which they are performed:

> Even though trompe-l'œil is meant to deceive and in some cases very nearly succeeds, it is not always accepted at once as a reality. At first sight the image comes as a surprise. By turns it inspires doubt and certainty in a continual readjustment of the gaze. The puzzled viewer is torn between the message of his eyes and the message of his brain. The mind may already know the right answer, and yet the spectator's reaction is to abandon his receptive passiveness and act in order to test what he sees... A 'relation of uncertainty' is thus created between the image and the viewer... (Milman 1983: 103).

The response of reason to the discomfort of a logically indeterminate space is, invariably, to search for an escape back into the known. It is one of the curious features of a successful trompe-l'œil, however, that the passageway back into the known may be blocked. This can be accomplished in a number of ingenuous ways. For example, in a remarkable work by the 17th century painter Cornelis Norbertus Gijsbrechts called *Turned-over Canvas*, the artist has depicted what appears to be the back of a painting. This ''negation of art'' was designed to be exhibited on the floor, propped up against the wall, where it would tease the naive viewer into picking it up and turning it over so as to see the painted side — which is, of course, not there. If the painting is successful as a work of art it can only be because it succeeds in heightening the spectator's awareness of the broadest possible parameters within which art functions. To turn over Gijsbrechts painting and be disappointed is to fail to let go of one's preconceptions about art, and so entirely to miss the point. For the trick of a trompe-l'œil does not so much reside in the technical features of

the painting as in its capacity to bring the viewer into the ‘‘relation of uncertainty’’ which is an effect of the artist’s vision:

> When, at a subsequent moment, the mystification becomes certain and unmistakable, is the picture to be rejected? It is at this point that one begins to realize what is meant by the strange and well-defined world of trompe-l’œil. A world without history or features, with no horizon or depth, in which the arts exchange their means of expression... The repertory of trompe-l’œil painting is made up of obsessive elements, it represents a reality immobilized by nails, held in the grip of death, corroded by time, glimpsed through half-open doors or undrawn curtains, containing messages that are sometimes unreadable, allusions that are often misunderstood, and a disorder of seemingly familiar and yet remote objects... (ibid.: 104–105)

Like Gijsbrechts, Nāgārjuna has placed before us a masterwork of the creative imagination that disturbs and provokes in that it appears to be something it is not, something *graspable*. We feel a compulsion to pick it up and turn it around in order to see what has been proven or, as the case may be, disproven. But to succumb to the temptation — and to be disappointed to find that neither the one nor the other has been accomplished — is, as I have already indicated, to miss the point, for the logically indeterminate space hiding behind the writing ought to tell us something about our own preoccupations, about the nature of our relationship with the meanings of words seemingly familiar and, at the same time, distressingly remote. What Proust has written about dreams is true not only of poems and novels, but of every written work: ‘‘[They] are not realizable, and we know it; we wouldn’t have any if it weren’t for desire, and it is useful to have them in order to see them fail and so that their failure may instruct’’ (Proust III: 181).[38]

It is the nature of the Mādhyamika trick not to argue, explain, command, or demonstrate — all of which would be self-defeating — but rather to *conjure*. ‘‘The strange and well defined world’’ conjured up in Nāgārjuna’s writing is ultimately none other than this world: ‘‘A world that is neither as it appears nor otherwise.’’[39]

It may be that the problem is, after all, more strictly historical in at least one way. I called attention at the beginning of this essay to the similarity between Robinson, Hayes and Bhāvaviveka, as well as to their primary difference: For Bhāvaviveka, Nāgārjuna the logician succeeds; for Robinson and Hayes, he fails. Robinson (1957: 307) has explained to us that this difference is due to the more sophisticated state of formal logic in our times. This suggests to me one final, unexplored dimension to the difficulty of understanding Nāgārjuna’s writing in its own historical context:

[38] Cited in Humphries (1999: 39). Faure (1993: 241) seems to have made a similar point: ‘‘Truth has no essence; it exists only through its effects and in particular through speech.’’

[39] Here I’m paraphrasing a line from the *Lankāvatārasūtra* (Vaidya 1960b: 64.6): *na te tathā yathā dṛṣṭā na ca te vai na santi ca/*

> When a lapse of time intervenes between the creation and reception of the work, the interpretation of a trompe-l'œil may become complex, for it is a mirror full of ambiguous reflections, also giving back both the image of the spectator and the image of his world with its own fancies and peculiar truths. (Milman 1983: 105)

Let us assume Robinson is correct, and we are more logically sophisticated than Nāgārjuna's contemporaries. It does not necessarily follow that we are in a better position to evaluate the significance of his work. The historically situated critic must be especially cautious about any temptation to apply contemporary standards of excellence to the technical accomplishments of an age long since past, as if the exquisite Roman frescoes of Pompeii were any less grand because the painters had not mastered post-renaissance canons of perspective. A genuine work of art (of artifice/of magic) is designed to achieve an effect, and it is in terms of the total effect it achieves on the audience for whom it is intended that its success or failure must ultimately be judged. Technical skill is only one element of creative genius, and it is often not the most significant one at that. Hayes' central question, then — "What would have seemed important to Nāgārjuna?" — might more provocatively be phrased: "What sort of *effect* was Nāgārjuna interested in achieving?" The answer to this question has a great deal to do with where one begins.

If you begin with the belief that Nāgārjuna was interested in systematically commanding Buddhists and non-Buddhists of his day to assent to a set of rationally grounded doctrines, tenets, or true conclusions, then Bhāvaviveka and other logicians are your best guides to the appreciation of his writing. But if, on the other hand, you are inclined to see Nāgārjuna as interested in helping his readers to achieve some degree of sensitivity for what it might mean to think and live in wholly other terms, if you sense that he was interested in conjuring up a philosophical and religious world in which it appears possible completely to cease identifying with any doctrine, tenet, thesis, or point of view, a groundless world of "non-abiding" in which one might surrender attachment to the elaborate and convoluted project that grows out of the compulsion to know something for certain, to command, demonstrate, prove or disprove something once and for all — including the validity of rational argumentation itself... If you begin here, with the admittedly perplexing belief that one may somehow come to relinquish all attachment to belief, then you are probably better off following the lead of Candrakīrti and those others, ancient and modern, who have tried to steer the conversation in more promising directions.

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Turning a Madhyamaka Trick: Reply to Huntington

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Abstract Huntington (2007); argues that recent commentators (Robinson, 1957; Hayes, 1994; Tillemans, 1999; Garfield and Priest, 2002) err in attributing to Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti a commitment to rationality and to the use of argument, and that these commentators do violence to the Madhyamaka project by using rational reconstruction in their interpretation of Nāgārjuna's and Candrakīrti's texts. Huntington argues instead that mādhyamikas reject reasoning, distrust logic and do not offer arguments. He also argues that interpreters ought to recuse themselves from argument in order to be faithful to these texts. I demonstrate that he is wrong in all respects: Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti deploy arguments, take themselves to do so, and even if they did not, we would be wise to do so in commenting on their texts.

Keywords Madhyamaka · Nāgārjuna · Candrakīrti · Huntington · Positionlessness · *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* · *Madhyamakāvatāra* · *Vigrahavyāvartanī*

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Huntington's Substantive Charge

In a recent paper (Huntington 2007) CW Huntington lumps Hayes (1994), Robinson (1957), Tillemans (1999) and me[1] together as a gang of four who allegedly read "Nāgārjuna through the lens of modern symbolic logic." [103] To have done this is apparently not good. Huntington asserts:

> I believe that the compulsion experienced by so many of Nāgārjuna's modern readers—to force a logical grid over the work of a writer who is so obviously and profoundly distrustful of logic—derives, to a considerable extent, from a skewed understanding of the intellectual history of Indian Buddhism. [111]

I tend not to reply to charges that my own work over-rationalizes the putatively irrationalist Buddhist tradition as I generally find these discussions a bit tired. But I am so honoured to be included in such august company, so bemused to see such a disparate set of scholars collected together in a single heterodox school, so outraged to be charged with taking Bhāvaviveka's side against Candrakīrti (and to be charged in a footnote with being a *classical* logician), and so respectful of Huntington's own voice in defending the radicalism and probity of the Prāsaṇgika position that I cannot resist rising to the bait.

Huntington's indictment involves two distinct charges, which unfortunately are somewhat confused in his own presentation, but which I wish to distinguish in order to reply most cogently (despite being charged with that very crime). First, he accuses us of falsely ascribing to Nāgārjuna and to Candrakīrti "rational arguments," having been seduced by "a long and complex scholastic enterprise, a construct of the religious imagination that proves, on closer inspection, to embody its own socio-political agenda," [110] to wit, the crypto-svātantrika Tibetan commentarial tradition, a tradition which fails, on his view, to take seriously Nāgārjuna's and Candrakīrti's claims to positionlessness, to offering no positive arguments and to a rejection of foundations, and so tames Madhyamaka along the lines set out by Bhāvaviveka.

Huntington points out that Hayes argues that "Nāgārjuna 'had a set of definitely stated doctrines for which he was trying to produce a systematically arranged set of rational arguments'" (Hayes 1994, p. 363, at 104), that "Tillemans writes that 'one must... suppose that [Nāgārjuna] believed his own reasoning by *reductio ad absurdum* to be not a mere ruse or sophism, but rather an argument that was valid and that resulted in a true conclusion...'" (Tillemans 1999, p. 191, Ibid.) Priest and I are quoted as saying that "Nāgārjuna 'is committed to rigorous analytical argument' and to 'true contradictions commanding rational assent'." (Garfield and Priest 2002, 87, Ibid.)[2] He continues:

> Hayes, Tillemans and Garfield share a common desire to characterize Nāgārjuna as an analytic, rationalist[3] philosopher. All three assume not only that his writing

[1] With Graham Priest as an unindicted co-conspirator, as he is co-author of the paper that draws the majority of Huntington's fire.

[2] I should note that Huntington has me in his crosshairs here, not Priest despite citing a joint paper.

[3] Here, and throughout his paper, Huntington uses the pejorative term "rationalist" not in the doxographic sense most familiar to Western philosophers to refer to philosophers loosely allied to Descartes and Leibniz, but to mean *committed to the probity and utility of reason.*

> *can* be successfully translated into the terms of modern symbolic logic, but that it may in fact benefit from such translation, which has the virtue of clarifying his language and freeing it from the onerous temptation to read him "as a simple mystic or irrationalist of some kind." (Garfield 2002, p. 87 at 104)[4]

Now, Huntington does note that despite our solidarity in rationalism, the Gang of Four is rent by divisions: Robinson and Hayes regard Nāgārjuna as a kind of philosophical confidence man, running a dialectical shell game whose fallacious character is revealed by logical analysis. Tillemans and I, he points out, are more impressed by Nāgārjuna's supposed logical acumen. Nonetheless, the fundamental error is the same. Nāgārjuna eschews all philosophical theses, but we persist in ascribing theses to him; Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti renounce reason, logic and rational argument as philosophical tools, but we persist in attributing arguments and theories of reasoning to them. For example

> In the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, Nāgārjuna responds to his Nyāya interlocutor with the following: "If I had anything to assert, I would fail. Because I have no proposition, I therefore cannot fail." Citing these same lines from the *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, Garfield (2002, p. 98) baldly exclaims: "Nāgārjuna's reply does not deny that he is asserting anything. How could he deny *that?"* Tillemans is a bit less blunt. ... "[Understanding Madhyamaka as reducing logic to upāya ... minimizes the role and seriousness of argumentation in the Madhyamaka system." (Tillemans 1999, p. 190) Finally Hayes [1994, p. 363] writes: "... it appears to me on examining the textual evidence that Nāgārjuna had a set of definitely stated doctrines for which he was attempting to provide a systematically arranged set of rational arguments." [109]

Huntington replies:

> If the citation from *Vigrahavyāvartanī* were an anomaly then the logicians' perspective would be easier to accommodate. Such is not the case. In fact the unqualified rejection of any sort of "definitely stated doctrine"—whether in the form of a philosophically stated view (*dṛṣṭi*), thesis (*pakṣa)* or proposition (*pratijnā)*—is not only a leitmotif of Nāgārjuna's writing, it is arguably the defining feature of his work, its single most troubling aspect, one with which any serious attempt at interpretation must come to grips. [Ibid].

Needless to say, I agree. But the question is how to come to grips, and this leads us to the second half of Huntington's critique: the hermeneutical.

Huntington's Hermeneutic Charge

Let us suppose for a minute that Huntington's channeling of Nāgārjuna is right—that despite his rejection of Hayes' and Robinson's objectivist quest for authorial intent, Huntington himself has got it. Suppose that Nāgārjuna and

[4] Here we see the two charges run together, as Huntington is charging us both with misreading Nāgārjuna and with using an inapposite hermeneutic tool. We will return to the second charge below.

Candrakīrti did intend, and take themselves to have accomplished, a renunciation of all assertions, of all arguments, and of all reliance on reason. Let us then ask: Would it still be acceptable to use logic and rational reconstruction in our own hermeneutic analysis of their position? Huntington responds in the negative. To do so would be to fail to learn the mādhyamika's lesson about the illegitimacy of this cognitive orientation, and its deployment would necessarily distort the texts.

To my relief, Huntington exempts Tillemans and me from one charge on his indictment. We, he acknowledges, see ourselves in the business of rational reconstruction, an enterprise with which Huntington explicitly avows sympathy (Huntington and Wangchen 1985). Hayes and Robinson, on the other hand, adopt a hermeneutic policy of the recovery of authorial intent, with

> the conclusions of such research... presented as 'pure historical exegesis' approaching 'the ideal of detached, scientific objectivity' in contrast to readings derived through the application of interpretive strategies based on other genres of modern philosophical thought, which are labeled "ethnocentric" and historically naive. [103–104]

Huntington, of course will have none of this:

> Hayes draws a stark distinction between interpretive, hermeneutical studies grounded in the search for contemporary relevance and the work of rigorous historical exegesis, which "attempts to discover what a text meant in the time it was written." [362] Such a distinction presupposes that it is possible for a competently trained historian to, so to speak, set aside his modern spectacles and read and understand a classical Indian text in the context of the time it was written without being compromised by interests characteristic of his or her own textual milieu. [105][5]

Huntington argues that the use of logic or the presumption of rationality or relevance to modern concerns is inevitably fatal:

> To engage in this sort of polemic is, I believe, to ensnare oneself in an irresolvable contradiction. How is the application of a thoroughly modern, culture-bound ideal of "detached scientific objectivity" to the analysis of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* any different from the attempt to read the same text through the lens of logical positivism, empiricism, pragmatism or deconstruction—all of which are dismissed by Hayes [363] as attempts to secure "the sort of comfort that attends finding famous and highly respected antecedents to one's own position?" In fact all of these approaches to exegesis—including Hayes' appeal to symbolic logic—embody certain sets of assumptions... none more or less immune to the charge of anachronism or ethnocentrism when applied to the interpretation of an ancient Sanskrit text. [107–108]

[5] But compare this remark of Huntington's a few pages later: "Like Robinson and Hayes, I insist that my interest here is primarily historical. ... I shall ... suggest that our best efforts to understand Nāgārjuna historically, in the context of his own time, have thus far been hampered by an inability to free ourselves from the vocabulary, values and presupposition of [the Indo-Tibetan] doxographic tradition." [111] Will the real C. W. Huntington please stand up?

Anachronism is not the worst of it. If we use logic, or reasoning in our interpretative practice when reading Madhyamaka, we contradict in method the very texts we address:

> Once we postulate that "Nāgārjuna had a set of definitely stated doctrines" then we are compelled to further assume that "he was trying to produce a systematically arranged set of arguments" in support of those doctrines. This was the position of Bhāvaviveka, and is built into the doxographic project which he initiated. ... No doubt his work has provided a powerfully seductive historical precedent...
>
> It is well known that Candrakīrti vehemently objected to Bhāvaviveka's logical method, on the grounds that it was a fundamental perversion of Nāgārjuna's project. Specifically, Candrakīrti maintained that the purpose of the *Madhyamakaśastra* has nothing to do with "commanding rational assent," or with demonstrating or proving or disproving anything. Rather, the goal is to uproot altogether the desire, or need, for rational certainty, and so to provide an antidote[6] to the intellectual and spiritual disease of clinging. This is accomplished by uncovering a logically indeterminate space between proof and disproof, affirmation and negation, consent or dissent. [122–123]

I can't pretend to know, let alone to occupy, this indeterminate space, rationalist that I am. But I do see what Huntington is driving at. He argues, following Pye (1978) and Fauré (1993) in what follows, that, for a mādhyamika, what looks like rational argument is in fact just spiritual exercise. And the point of this spiritual exercise is simply to cure one of the very need for rational argument or reason. So, to use logic and reason as a hermeneutical devices is first, to stand convicted of having misunderstood the texts in the first place: if one had understood them and appreciated their force, one would never be tempted to reason. Second, it is to impose an interpretative framework on the texts that their authors would reject as a method for understanding them; any interpretation issuing from such a method would be a foreign imposition, a kind of violence to the text.

In defending this view, Huntington cites at length an interchange in *Prasannapadā* to which we will need to return below. Here Candrakīrti replies to a purvapakṣa who Huntington, perhaps rashly,[7] identifies as Bhāvaviveka, but is more likely a more generic pramānavādin. In this interchange, Candrakīrti argues (at least it looks to *me* like he argues) that certainty (*niścaya*) in the ordinary sense is not the property of the insight of āryas. For, he says, certainty would have to arise from an argument needed to dispel uncertainty. The purvapakṣa asks then whether the mādhyamika's statements are certain. Candrakīrti replies that they are for ordinary persons. The āryas, on the other hand, he says, eschew discursive thought, and so all argument. Huntington concludes from this passage that Candrakīrti rejects all

6 Reading "antidote" for "anecdote," but the irony in the typo is too cute to pass up.

7 See Arnold (2005) and Thakchöe for arguments that the relevant purvapakṣa is a Mimamsika (Arnold) or a foundationalist such as Dignāga (Thakchöe). I think that the passage is in fact directed generally at any foundationalist account of pramāṇa.

argument.[8] I will suggest below that at best this shows only that āryas in meditative equipoise do not present arguments.

[8] There are also issues to be raised with Huntington's translation of this passage. He has it as follows:

> [Candrakīrti] If we allowed for any real certainty whatsoever then either it would have to arise from some valid means of knowledge or else it would not. But we do not allow for any certainty. How is that? There could be certainty if there some possibility of uncertainty as its opposite. When we do not allow for any real uncertainty, however, then, in the absence of its opposite, how could there be certainty? [Discussion of certainty] without reference to its partner would like [arguing whether] a donkey's horn is long or short...
> [Bhāvaviveka] If you allow for no certainty whatsoever, then why does your statement about things not arising from self, etc, appear to be certain?
> [Candrakīrti] This statement is certain for worldly people who interpret it in terms of arguments familiar to them. It is not certain for those with deep insight.
> [Bhāvaviveka] Do those with deep insight really have no conclusive argument?
> [Candrakīrti] Who can say whether they do or they don't? For those with deep insight the truth of the highest meaning is a state of silence. This being so, how is there any possibility of discursive thinking out of which we might find either a conclusive argument or no real argument at all? (Huntington 2003, pp. 77–78 at 124, trans from *Prasannapadā* (Vaidya 1960a; 19.16–29))

Here is how I read the passage from the sDe dge Tibetan edition (starting a bit higher up in the text for more context):

> Suppose one argued as follows: ...Since with no epistemic authority, there can be no understanding, how, according to you, can there be ascertainment of reality? Therefore, the statement, "all phenomena are unarisen" wouldn't even make sense. To the extent that you can be certain of the statement, "all phenomena are unarisen," I can be certain of my statement that all phenomena exist. In the same way that you are certain of your statement "all phenomena are unarisen" I can be certain that all of my phenomena are arisen. If, however, you, have no certainty about the idea that all phenomena are unarisen, your failure to attain certainty would make it impossible to bring another to understand. Therefore it would be pointless to compose a treatise! Therefore, the existence of no entities has been refuted!
> We would reply as follows: According to us, if there were such "certainty," since it would have to either arise from epistemic authority or from an absence of epistemic authority, there is none.
> "Why does that follow?" one might ask.
> Since, according to us, where there is uncertainty, in dependence on that, certainty is achieved as its antidote in the case where there is no uncertainty, how can certainty arise as its opposite, since it depends on its opposite? This is just like a donkey's horn being long or short! Since in that case there is no certainty, what conclusion is to be established by means of what epistemic authority? How could the enumeration, characteristic, object, identity or difference of anything one established "arise causelessly?" None of these are asserted by us.
> So, one might ask, "According to you, since there is no certainty, how can you be certain that you understand the purport of the statement that entities arise "neither from themselves, nor from another nor from both nor causelessly?"
> We say that this statement is certain for ordinary people on the strength of arguments that are appropriate for them, but this is not so for the āryas.
> "Do āryas not reason?," one might ask.
> Who can say whether they do or not? The ultimate for āryas is said to be silent. Therefore, whether they are appropriate or inappropriate, in the context of what fabrication could they either engage in it or not? (Candrakīrti 2003, pp. 40–42)

de la gal te ... thad ma med pas don rtogs pa yang med na ni khyod kyi yang dag pa'i ngas pa 'di ga las 'gyur te/de'i phyir dngos po rnams skye ba med do zhes bya ba yang yin la/yang ji ltar khyod kyi dngos pot hams cad skye ba med do zhes bya ba'i ngas pa 'dir 'gyur ba de kho n altar nga'i dngos po thams cad skye bar yang 'gyur ro/ ci ste khyod la dngos pot ham cad skye ba med do snyam pa'i ngas pa 'di na ni/de'i thse ran nyid kyis kyang ma nngas pa gzhan khong du chud par byed pa mi srid pa'i phyir bstan bcos rtsom pa don med pa nyid du 'gyur te/des na ngos pot hams cad bkag pa med par yod pa yin no zhe na/

Huntington concludes as follows:

> It is the nature of the Mādhyamika trick not to argue, explain, command, or demonstrate—all of which would be self-defeating—but rather to *conjure.* The "strange and well-defined world" conjured up in Nāgārjuna's writing is none other than this world: a world that is neither as it appears nor otherwise. [128]
>
> …
>
> If you begin with the belief that Nāgārjuna was interested in systematically commanding Buddhists and non-Buddhists of his day to assent to a set of rationally grounded doctrines, tenets, or true conclusions, then Bhāvaviveka and other logicians are your best guide to the appreciation of his writings. But if, on the other hand, you are inclined to see Nāgārjuna as interested in helping his readers to achieve some degree of sensitivity for what it might mean to think and live in wholly other terms... if you begin here, with the admittedly perplexing belief that one may somehow come to relinquish all attachment to belief, then you are probably better off following the lead of Candrakīrti and those others, ancient and modern, who have tried to steer the conversation in more promising directions. [129]

It is time to ask just which directions are most promising, as well as which directions are those indicated by Candrakīrti.

The Role of Logic and Reason in Hermeneutic Method

Let us first grant for the sake of argument that Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti explicitly eschew logic and reasoning. I will argue below that this in fact false. Even if they do disavow reason, we would still have to ask whether, as contemporary Western interpreters, *we* should eschew logic and reasoning in interpreting their texts. This is

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footnote 8 continued
brjod par bya ste/gal te kho bo cag la ngas pa zhes bya ba 'ga' zhig yod par 'gyur na ni/de tshad ma las skyes pa'am/tshad ma ma yin pa las skyes shig tu 'gyur na/yod pa ni ma yin no/
ci'i phyir zhe na/
'dir ma nges pa yod na ni de la ltos shing de'i gnyen por gyur pa'i nges pa yang yod par 'gyur ba zhig na/ gang gi tshe re zhig kho bo cag la ma ngas pa nyid yod pa ma yin pa de'i tshe ni de dang 'gal ba'i nges pa yod par ga la 'gyur te/'bras ba can gzhan la ma ltos pa'i phyir/bong bu'i rwa'i ring po dang thung ba nyid bzhin no/gang gi tshe de ltar nges pa med pa de'i thse ci zhig 'grub par bya ba'i phyir tshad ma dag yongs su rtog par byed/de dag gi grangs dang mtshan nyid dang yul dang/bdag gam gzhan nam gnyi ga'am rgyu med pa las skye zhes bya bar yang ga la 'gyur te/'di dag tham cad ni kho bo cag gis brjod par bya ba ma yin pa zhig go/
gal te de ltar khyod la nges pa yod pa ma yin na/khyed cag gi dngos po rnams ni/
bdag las ma yin gzhan las min//
gnyis las ma yin rgyu med min//
zhes bya ba'i nges pa'i rang bzhin gyi ngag 'di ji ltar dmigs she na/
brjod par bya ste/ nges par gyur bya ba'i ngag 'di ni rang la grub pa'i 'thad pa'i sgo nas 'jig rten la yod kyi/ 'phags pa rnams la ni ma yin no/
ci 'phags pa rnams la rigs pa mi mang' 'am zhe na/
yod pa'am med pa 'di sus smras/'phags pa rnams kyi don dam pa ni can mi gsung ba yin te/de'i phyir gang la 'thad pa dang 'thad pa ma hyin pa mi mang' bar 'gyur ba de dag la spros pa mang' bar ga la 'gyur/

a question about hermeneutic method. Under this head, there are two sub-questions to be considered: First, as interpreters of these avowedly anti-rational philosophers can we use reason and logic to defend our readings? Second, can we cogently attribute reasoning to them, even if they disavow its use, and can we characterize them as employing a logic, even if they claim not to be doing so?

As a background, let us ask, "what are we doing as 21st Century interpreters of Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti?" Here I agree with Huntington, and want to take him at his word: We are not trying to recover authorial intent, if that is supposed to be something beyond textual meaning; we are not committing the historicist/objectivist fallacy of which Huntington convicts my misguided colleagues Tillemans, Robinson and Hayes. We are instead trying to construct a reading of those texts that makes sense of them in the dual contexts provided by the textual milieu in which they figure historically-the context of their composition—and our own interpretative horizon, which is the only context in which we can read and understand. As Huntington would agree, although we will necessarily bring our own prejudices to bear in reading, we must be open to challenges to those prejudices presented by the text, and so must be prepared, in the course of understanding, to attribute views at odds with our own to Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, as well as to have our views modified by textual encounter. To engage with a text is to take that text seriously, and that entails a critical engagement, a kind of engagement, I might add that is common in the Indian tradition. This is just familiar Gadamerian hermeneutical theory. But it is good to have all of our cards on the table, even when they are from a familiar deck.

Of course when we interpret these texts, it is our contemporary readers with whom we are engaged in dialogue, and not the authors of the texts we are interpreting. Huntington is talking to *us*. And note that he is arguing. He is presenting *reasons* for adopting his own view, and *reasons* for rejecting ours. While pointing this out might appear to be a cheap *ad hominem,* in fact it illustrates part of the hermeneutical predicament. As members of a culture that values reason, we employ reason. If Huntington did not offer arguments of at least prima facie cogency, we would have no reason to take him seriously in the first place. And of course he never denies his *own* use of reason, for as he must recognize, even the defence of an irrationalist reading demands rational justification. Huntington properly neither recuses himself from this enterprise nor argues explicitly at this level of discourse—the metahermeneutical—that we should.

Of course he *could*. Suppose he argued as follows (and this is in fact how he characterizes Nāgārjuna's and Candarakīrti's strategy): I, Huntington offer no arguments that I, Huntington, endorse. Nor do I expect that you, Gang of Four, will be convinced *for good reason* by the arguments I offer. Instead, I say two things: First, words in philosophical discourse function *causally*, not *logically*. They bring about cognitive states in their audience not because they entail conclusions, but because they transform consciousness, like psychotropic drugs. Secondly, because *you, Gang of Four*, endorse the use of logic and worship at the altar of rational discourse, I know that the arguments *I* offer, but that *you* would endorse will *cause you* to relinquish your position, and so, I use these *gzhan grags tsam* arguments to *cause* you to come to your senses. If, as I expect, they are efficacious, you will never endorse reason again.

What should our response as interpreters be to this position? Well, suppose that we are convinced in our primitive rational moment by the argument, before concluding in a higher moment of the dialectic that the interpretation of texts should never be guided by reason. Where do we go from there? We can't endorse our conclusion, or recommend it to others, and this for a very simple reason: We have no *reason* to believe it ourselves, and no *reason* to believe that the fact that reason is self-subverting, or even that the fact, were it so, that reason is *always* self-subverting would be a good reason to reject reason. All we could say is that an argument we now regard as pointless has caused us to reject arguments. This is an analytical dead-end. To the extent that we are interpreters, and are comparing readings of texts, this leads us to give up. And notice that *none* of the classical Indian mādhyamika interpreters of Nāgārjuna, including Candrakīrti, ever eschew argument for their readings.

As interpreters,we are obligated at least to the cogency of our own interpretative arguments. But we are also obligated to maximize the cogency of the texts we read. Once again, this simply good hermeneutic practice. It represents what Davidson calls "the principle of charity" in interpretation and Gadamer "the anticipation of perfection." In adjudicating between competing interpretations of a text, we choose the one that assigns to it the most cogent position, and cogency is hard to make sense of without a background assumption of rationality. In sum, a commitment to reason is a transcendental condition of interpretability. We would need powerful considerations to move us to the position that a text worthy of interpretation was simply irrational, eschewing any logic. It would always be more plausible to conclude that we simply don't understand it at all.

Moreover, as interpreters, we read texts for *reasons*. We have concerns we expect a text to address; in particular, as philosophers, we expect to learn from the texts we address. To put the point in Gadamer's terms, terms Huntington himself endorses, the understanding we anticipate involves a fusion of our horizons with those of the texts we study. As Gadamer reminds us, we don't read an eminent text with the anticipation that our prejudices will all be confirmed. We don't read to find ourselves in the mirror of the text. Nonetheless, we read in search of an interlocutor, one who can say something that will be meaningful to us, and to the degree that it dislodges our preconceptions, one who will be persuasive to us. Once again, this demand imposes a presumption of rationality. For we come to philosophical texts prepared to be persuaded, and prepared to respond critically to persuasion.

We can imagine Huntington nodding, and arguing that among the things of which we as readers of Madhyamaka should be prepared to be persuaded is that this presumption of rationality itself should be up for grabs. Madhyamaka, he argues, is the apogee of philosophical radicalism, rejecting even the hegemony of philosophical method. But this Feyerabendian enthusiasm (and Huntington does refer to Feyerabend as an authority [106-107]) has an ironic dimension: Huntington aims at the displacement of the commitment to reason as an Archimedean vantagepoint from which to pursue philosophy, on the very ground that Archimedean viewpoints are unjustifiable. In doing so, however, he must himself adopt a viewpoint transcendent of all rational method, and even then, even more ironically, he can only use reason as a device for justifying his reading.

Finally, even if we *grant* Huntington's own reading of the purport of Prasaṇgika Madhyamaka, and agree that Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti are irrationalists, we must be open to the possibility their self-understanding may be erroneous. Insofar as we follow Huntington's own admonitions to take texts on their own terms, and to abandon the quest of chimerical authorial intent, all admonitions I am happy to endorse, we must be open to the possibility that even if Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti themselves *assert* that they reject logic and reason, they are simply wrong about this—that they in fact present reasons for these views, and that their arguments conform to a canon of logic.

I conclude that there are no good grounds for us as readers and interpreters to check reason or logic at the door when reading Madhyamaka, even if we conceive of ourselves as good mādhyamika readers. We now turn to the second, and more important, issue Huntington raises, the question of what Nāgārjuna's and Candrakīrti's texts actually mean. We will see that, far from being irrationalists, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti are philosophers committed to rational discourse.

Nāgārjuna's and Candrakīrti's Endorsement of Logic

First, let us note that under this head Huntington confuses two further issues that we need to keep separate: The first is the question of whether Nāgārjuna—or Nāgārjuna as read through Candrakīrti—defends a position, and in what doing so or not doing so consists. The second is the question of whether, either in defending that position or rejecting all positions, Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti employ or endorse logic and reasoning. These issues may be related, but they are distinct. Huntington takes the Gang of Four to task on both scores, and sees them as constituting the same error. I will return to the question of positionlessness in the final section of this paper, and as we will see, Huntington is not as far from at least some members of the Gang of Four as he thinks on this issue. But for now let us address the narrower issue of whether or not the prasaṇgika mādhyamika endorses or uses logic or reasoning.

This question is delicate as well, and we must be careful not to beg any questions against Huntington. It is far too easy to find instances of reasoning in the relevant texts (after all, one of them is even *called Yuktiṣaṣṭika!*). The question in each case, though, has to be this: Is the form of reasoning employed one that is endorsed by Nāgārjuna himself or Candrakīrti himself, or is it just, as Huntington would have to have it, a form of argument endorsed by the *purvapakṣa,* and used only *ad hominem* by the mādhyamika? I will argue that there is plenty of the former, and then will comment on the kind of argument and the use of reason that is represented.[9]

[9] As Hayes (1994) points out, Nāgārjuna follows Indian canons of argument and grammatical analysis very closely indeed. Even when he argues that he is positionless, he does so in a way recognizable to any Indian interlocutor as philosophical argument. More of this below.

Let us first consider an example from Nāgārjuna, choosing an instance that cannot plausibly be understood as purely *gzhan grags.* I will choose only one, as this should be sufficient to make the point, but I choose it from a text Huntington himself cites, and consider his favoured commentary. We turn to chapter XXIV of *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, and go straight to the central verses, on which the entire text turns:

> That which is dependent origination
> Is explained to be emptiness.
> That, being a dependent designation,
> Is itself the middle way. [18]
>
> There does not exist anything
> That is not dependently arisen.
> Therefore there does not exist anything
> That is not empty. [19]

These verses occur following a castigation of a reificationist opponent who argues that the doctrine that Nāgārjuna appears to me to be defending—that all phenomena are empty of essence—amounts to nihilism and hence a repudiation of the four noble truths. Here, Nāgārjuna argues both that all phenomena are empty, explicitly casting this as an argument (*gang phyir... de phyir* in the Tibetan version of the second of these two verses making this the only possible reading) whose premises are the universality of dependent origination (a conclusion he has, we would argue established through a host of other arguments) and the identity of dependent origination with emptiness. These also constitute a clear argument for the conclusion that emptiness is not non-existence, since it is identified with dependent origination. To say that Nāgārjuna does not argue here flies in the face of the text; to say that this is a mere reductio ignores the structure of the argument; to say that Nāgārjuna does not endorse this argument, or its premises makes a hash even of the reductio arguments he offers throughout the text.

And if you don't take my word for it, take Candrakīrti's. His commentary in *Prasannapadā* spells the argument out step by step. The gloss on [18] reads as follows:

> We assert the statement "emptiness itself is a designation." A chariot is designated as a chariot in dependence on its parts, such as its wheels. That which is designated in dependence upon its parts is essentially unarisen; and that which is essentially unarisen is empty. The emptiness that is the characteristic of the essentially unarisen is called "the middle way." Therefore, since whatever is essentially unarisen does not have existence, and since whatever is essentially unarisen is not annihilated, and so does not fail to exist, it follows that it is free from the two extremes of existence and nonexistence. Moreover, because the emptiness that is the characteristic of the essentially unarisen is the middle way, it is called

> "the middle path." Therefore, it follows that "emptiness," "dependent designation," and "the middle path" are synonyms of "dependent origination." [450–451][10]

Commenting on [19], Candrakīrti writes:

> Since there are no phenomena that are not dependently originated, and since dependent origination is emptiness, it follows that there are no non-empty phenomena. Since they exist in that way, it follows that according to us, all phenomena are empty. Others' reductios meant to undermine our position do not apply. ... [452][11]

It is pretty clear on its own terms that Nāgārjuna's text is developing an argument he endorses for a conclusion he endorses; it is also clear that the principal authority for a prāsaṇgika reading agrees, and that he is loath neither to set the argument out explicitly nor to endorse it as an argument for a view.

Now let us turn to Candrakīrti's own discussions. I begin with a passage from the first chapter of *Prasannapadā* where Candrakīrti is talking explicitly about epistemic authority (*prāmaṇa)*. Huntington, as we have seen, argues that Candrakīrti rejects all epistemic authority, including, *a fortiori,* all inference, and all of the results of the use of epistemic authority. But consider:

> Therefore we assert that mundane objects are known through the four kinds of authoritative cognition.[12] They are mutually dependent: When there is authoritative cognition, there are objects of knowledge; when there are objects of knowledge, there is authoritative cognition. But neither authoritative cognition nor objects of knowledge exist inherently.[13] (Candrakīrti 2003, p. 55).

It is very clear from these remarks that Candrakīrti endorses the utility of conventional epistemic authority, indeed of the quartet of epistemic warrants endorsed by the Nyāyika, including inference, and that he thinks that there are genuine objects of mundane

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[10] stong pa nyid de nyid ni brten nas gdags pa zhes bya bar rmam par gzhag go/'khor lo la sogs pa shing rta'i yan lag la brten nas shing rtar 'dogs la/de' rang gi yan lag la brten nas btags pa gang yin pa de ni/rang bzhin gyis ma skye pa'i mthsan nhyid can gyi stong pa nyid de nyid ni dbu ma'i lam yin zhes bya bar rnam par gzhag ste/'di ltar gang zhig rang bzhin gyis ma skyes pa de la ni/yod pa nyid med la/gang bzhin gyis skyes pa la 'jig pa med pas med a nyid med pa de'i phyir/yod pa dang med pa'i mtha' gnyis dang bral ba de'i phyir/rang bzhin gyis ma skyes pa'i mtshan nyid can gyi stong pa nyid de nyid ni dbu ma'i lam ste/dbu ma'i shul zhes bya'o/de'i phyir de ltar na stong pa nyid dang/brten nas gdags pa dang/dbu ma'i lam zhes bya ba 'di dag ni rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba nyid kyi ming gi bye brag yin no/

[11] de ltar rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba ma yin pa'i chos 'ga' yang yod pa ma yin la rten cing 'brel bar 'byung ba yang stong pa hin pa de'i phyir stong pa ma yin pa'i chos 'ga' yang yod pa ma yin no/gang gi phyir 'di de ltar yin pa de'i phyir/kho bo cag gi ltar na chos thams cad stong pa yin zhing/gzhan gyis smras pa'i skyon du thal bar gyur ba yang ma yin no/

[12] perception, inference, testimony and analogy.

[13] de'i phyir de ltar tshad ma bzhi las 'jig rten gyi don rtogs par rnam par jog pa yin no/de dag kyang phan tshun ltos pas 'grub par 'gyur te/tshad ma dag yod na gzhal bya'i don dag tu 'gyur la/gzhal bya'i don dag yod na tshad ma dag tu 'gyur gyi/tshad ma dang gzhal bya gnyis ngo bo nyod kyis grub pa ni yod pa ma yin no/

knowledge. He also clearly endorses the coherentism Nāgārjuna defends in *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, and so Nāgārjuna's position that coherentism, far from undermining the possibility of knowledge, is the only way of making sense of epistemic practices. This brings us back to the passage from this text Huntington cited above. As I remarked, that text, far from constituting a rejection of reasoning, relegates reasoning, along with everything else, to the conventional world. But that is precisely the world in which philosophical activity occurs.[14]

Let us now turn briefly to *Madhyamakāvatāra.* Here are a few verses from the sixth chapter that cannot be understood as anything but *presentations of arguments* that Candrakīrti *endorses* for *positions* he *endorses*. There is no purvapakṣa in the neighbourhood of these verses, and none is indicated in the autocommentary:

All phenomena, on the basis of being seen correctly and falsely,
Are understood to have two natures.
Whatever is the object of correct perception is reality.
That which is seen falsely is explained to be conventional truth. [VI:23]

We maintain that there are two kinds of false perception:
That by healthy and that by impaired sense faculties.
The understanding of those with impaired sense faculties
Is regarded as false by comparison with that of those with healthy faculties. [VI:24]

Mundane knowledge is that which is apprehended
By the six unimpaired sense faculties.
That is true by conventional standards. The rest
Is regarded as conventionally false.[15] [VI:25]

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[14] Thakchöe (unpublished, 13) argues that Candrakīrti follows Dignāga in endorsing the Nyāya list of pramaṇas, but that since he does not endorse their ontology, there is an important sense in which his epistemology is very different. Arnold (2005) argues that Candrakīrti's epistemology is essentially Dignāga's. I take a middle path, thinking that Candrakīrti grafts Dignāga's prāmaṇas onto Nāgārjuna's coherentism to get a complete prāsaṇgika epistemology. But whichever understanding one adopts, it is clear that here Candrakīrti is endorsing reason, inference, and the possibility of knowledge, despite rejecting Bhāvaviveka's account of formal argument and the epistemology that entails. He is no irrationalist, as Huntington would have us believe, but that does not make him into a svātantrika!

[15] dngos kun yang dag rdzun pa mthong ba yis//
dngos rnyed ngo bo gnyis ni 'dzin par 'gyur//
yang dag mthong yul gang yin de nyid de//
mthong ba rdzun pa kun rdzob bden par gsungs//

mthong ba rdzun pa'ang rnam pa gnyis 'dod de//
dbang po gsal dang dbang po skyon ldan no//
skyon ldan dbang can rnams kyi shes pa ni//
dbang po legs 'gyur shes bltos log par 'dod//

gnod pa med pa'i dbang po drug rnams kyis//
gzung ba gang zhig 'jig rten gyis rtogs te//
'jig rten nyid las bden in lhag ma ni//
'jig rten nid las log par rnam par gzhag//

Here Candrakīrti clearly distinguishes between the two truths, arguing that they can be distinguished on the basis of the kind of authoritative cognition appropriate to each, and, in the autocommentary a detailed argument for the claim that they are two natures, not two perspectives on a single nature. He then turns to the important question of the distinction between conventional truth and falsity and argues here and in the autocommentary that it makes sense to regard conventional truth as truth, in part because we can distinguish truth from falsehood. Here Candrakīrti is clearly presenting an account of the two truths, of the distinction between them, and of the sense in which they are each truths, and *defending this account with argument*. If there is any doubt, consider this remark in the autocommentary to VI:25:

> *Therefore*, ordinary people understand whatever is the object of the six sense faculties unaffected by the conditions that constitute the previously mentioned impairment to be mundane truth. However, from the standpoint of the āryas, it is not.[16] [1993, p. 100]

A bit further along in this discussion, Candrakīrti turns to the question of the actual nature of phenomena according to Madhyamaka. Once again, he is expounding and defending the doctrine of emptiness in the context of the two truths:

> If things existed in dependence on their own characteristics,
> By refuting that, things would be destroyed.
> In that case, emptiness would be the cause of their destruction.
> The fact that this makes no sense means they do not so exist. [VI:34]
>
> Since when entities are analyzed,
> Apart from having the nature of being as they are in reality,
> They have no mode of existence.
> Therefore, mundane convention should not be analyzed. [VI:35]
>
> Since the same reasoning that shows that arising from self and other
> Make no sense in the context of reality,
> Shows that they do not make any sense conventionally,
> How could the arising you propound occur? [VI:36]
>
> Empty entities such as reflections
> Are not manifest without depending on collocations.
> In the same way, from an empty reflection,
> Consciousness of that form can be seen to arise. [VI:37]

[16] de'i phyir de ltar 'jig rten gyis dbang po la gnod pa'i rkyen ji skad dub shad pa med par dbang po rdug car gyis bzung bar bya ba'i don rtog pa de ni 'jig rten nyid las bden pa yin gyi 'phags pa la bltos nas ni ma yin no/

In the same way, since all phenomena are empty,
Everything arises from emptiness.[17] [VI:38ab]

These verses themselves are explicitly reasoned, replete with logical vocabulary, and clear development of arguments from premises that Candrakīrti clearly endorses. But lest there be any doubt, consider just a few extracts from the autocommentary on a few of these verses. Commenting on VI:34, Candrakīrti writes:

> *Therefore*, whatever is conventional truth is a means for engaging with ultimate truth. *It follows that* without investigating as to whether there is arising from self or other, we assert this in an ordinary mundane framework.[18] [Ibid. 113]

Commenting on VI:36, Candrakīrti writes:

> Just as in the context of the ultimate, we have shown through argument that arising from self or other make no sense, these same arguments show that even in the conventional, these make no sense. So, by means of what argument could you show that entities are arisen from what? Therefore, in the context of neither of the two truths is there arising through its own characteristic.[19] [Ibid. 116]

These are but a few examples. I choose these verses because of their direct philosophical and commentarial connection to those of Nāgārjuna discussed above. In these passages, Candrakīrti presents his view of emptiness, and explicitly locates the articulation of that view in the context of a discussion of conventional truth and its basis in the conventional prāmaṇas. Candrakīrti is making it as plain as day that the arguments he is offering are conventionally valid, and that their conclusions are

[17] gal te rang gi mtshan nyid brten 'gyur na//
de la skur pas dngos po 'jig pa'i phyir//
stong nyid dngos po 'jig pa'i rgyur 'gyur na//
de ni rigs min de phyir dngos yod min//

gang phyir dngos po 'di dag rnam dpyad na//
de nyid bdag can dngos las tshu rol du//
gnas rnyed ma yin de phyir 'jig rten gyi//
tha snyad bden la rnam par dbyad mi bya//

de nyid skabs su rigs pa gang zhig gis//
bdag dang gzhan las skye ba rigs min pa'i//
rags des tha snyad du yang rigs min pas//
khyod kyi skye ba gang gis yin par 'gyur//

dngos pos tong pa gzugs brnyan la sogs pa//
chogs la ltos rnams ma grags pa yang min//
ji ltar der ni gzugs brnyan sogs stong las//
shes pa de yi rnam par skye 'gyur ltar//

de gzhin gngos pot hams cad stong na yang//
stong nyid dag las rab tu skye bar 'gyur//

[18] de'i phyir kun rdzob kyi bden pa gang yin pa de ni don dam pa'i bden pa la 'jug par bya ba'i thabs yin pa'i phyir//bdag dang gzhan dag las skye ba ma dpyad par 'jig rten pa'i lugs kyis khas len par byed pa yin no/

[19] ji ltar don dam pa'i skabs su ji skad bsad pa'i rigs pas bdag dang gzhan las skye ba mi ring ba de bzhin du tha snyad du yang/de nyid kyis skye bar mi rigs pas kyod kyis kngos po rnams kyi skye ba gang gis 'grub par'gyur/de'i phyir rang gi mtshan nyid kyi skye ba nib den pa gnyis char du yang yod pa ma yin no//

conventional truth, and that is all the truth one could ever want to articulate. After all, the ultimate, he has reminded us, is silent.

Finally, consider this discussion in which Candrakīrti is summing up the results of his examination of dependent origination in *Madhyamakāvatāra:*

> Since things are neither produced causelessly,
> Nor with such things as Iśvāra as a cause,
> Nor from themselves, nor from another, nor from both,
> It follows that they are dependently arisen. [114]
>
> Since entities are all dependently arisen,
> It is impossible for these conceptions (reification) to make sense.
> Therefore, the argument from dependent origination
> Completely shreds the net of false views.[20] [115]

Commenting on this latter verse, Candrakīrti writes:

> Since only by this argument, called the "argument from dependent origination," can one show that conventional phenomena can exist in this context, but not in any other, it follows that only on the basis of this argument from dependent origination—merely because all things are conditioned—can the net of false views be entirely torn to shreds. Therefore, only by engaging with the meaning of dependent origination through this account of being conditioned can one avoid attributing essence to things.[21] [213–214]

This is a real smoking gun: an explicit defense of argument, and a claim that dependent origination is defended through argument. Moreover, as we have seen, this is not just the purvapakṣa's logic, as Huntington would have us believe that all prāsaṇgika reasoning must be. Not only does this set of verses and its commentary stand alone as a defense of the view Candrakīrti asserts, with positive conclusions drawn from explicitly formulated arguments, but he has taken pains in this very context to remind the reader that mundane knowledge is possible, and that it is possible through the use of mundane epistemic warrants, which include inference. Candrakīrti does not only offer arguments, but he explicitly endorses that practice.

[20] gang phyir rgyu med pa dang dbang phyug gi//
rgyu la sogs dang bdag gzhan gni ga las//
dngos rnams skye bar 'gyur ba ma yin pa//
de phyir rten nas rab tu skye bar 'gyur//

gang phyir dngos po rten nas rab 'byung bas//
rtog pa 'di dag brtag par mi nus pa//
de phyir rten 'byung rigs pa 'di yis ni//
lta ngan drwa ba mtha' dag gcod par byed//

[21] gang gi phyir 'di la brten nas 'di 'byung ngo zhas bya ba'i rigs pa 'di tsam zhig gis dngos po kun rdzob pa rnams kyis bdag gi dngos po yod pa 'thob kyi/gzhan du ma yin pa de'i phyir rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba rkyen nhid 'di pa tsam gyis rigs pa 'dis ji skad bshad pa'i lta ba ngan pa'i drwa mtha' dag gcod pa yin no/'di ltar rkyen nyid 'di pa tsam zhig rten cing 'brel par 'byung ba'i don du rnam par 'jog pas ni dngos po 'ga' la yang rang bzhin khas mi blangs te/

Still Crazy after All These Years

All of this raises a deep question: Are we taming Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti? I sure hope not. As one who has been accused in the past of presenting Nāgārjuna as too radical for classical India, I am sensitive to the charge of developing a reactionary reading. As one who has argued strenuously for taking Nāgārjuna's avowals of rejecting all views, and of positionlessness seriously, I am sensitive to the charge of now saddling him with a view, a position. And as one who has agued strenuously for Tsong khapa's position that the issue between Candrakīrti and Bhāvaviveka is philosophically serious, and does cut to the heart of an understanding of emptiness, I am sensitive to the importance of being located on the wrong side of that dispute. Finally, as one who has been properly located as an opponent of the Hayes/ Robinson understanding of Nāgāruna as a cheap charlatan, I am sensitive to the charge of being a fellow-traveller in their interpretative enterprise.

On my reading Nāgārjuna remains philosophically interesting, and indeed, despite being rational, radical, for a number of reasons. First, the logic is pretty interesting. While Huntington claims that I saddle Nāgārjuna with a classical logic, (105 n 4) in fact the logic that Priest and I ascribe him is a paraconsistent logic. Given the fact that many contemporary philosophers charge those of us who endorse paraconsistency with transgressing the bounds of rationality (incorrectly, of course), and given the fact that many scholars have emphasized that Indian logicians are virtually unanimous in rejecting contradiction, suggesting that Nāgārjuna anticipates our willingness to accept true contradictions at the limits of thought is hardly to render him mainstream in *any* period or tradition. Indeed, we think that modern Western logicians and philosophers have a lot to learn from Nāgārjuna, precisely because he presents such profound arguments for the inconsistency of reality. He demonstrates that it is rational to regard phenomena as empty, and that one cannot adopt that view consistently and remain rational. He does not therefore argue that one should abandon rationality, but consistency.[22]

Second, the metaphysics Nāgārjuna develops is pretty radical. Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti, after all, argue that all phenomena are empty of essence, that the conventional and ultimate truth are identical, that nothing exists ultimately, and that the ultimate nature of things is to have no ultimate nature. There is plenty to challenge our philosophical intuitions here. And again, to suggest that in order to accept this way of taking up with reality one must be irrational is to trivialize these insights. Nāgārjuna's position is that the only rational account of reality is one according to which all phenomena are empty, including emptiness, according to which the ultimate nature of things is to have no nature, and according to which there is no difference between conventional and ultimate truth.

Third, the epistemology is interesting. Nāgārjuna, as Huntington points out, argues that there is no foundation to knowledge, that *pramāṇa* and *prameya* are always mutually dependent. This is so despite the fact that he does *not*, as

[22] Though it is not obvious that this is the case, it is possible that part of why Huntington fails to understand Priest's and my reading of Nāgārjuna is because he confuses rationality with consistency and thinks that we (like Robinson and Hayes) attribute consistency to Nāgārjuna in virtue of rationality.

Huntington charges, eschew the possibility of knowledge and justification altogether. Nāgāruna is an anti-foundationalist, a defender of the utility of conventional practices, not an epistemic nihilist. He is hence the first philosopher in any tradition to defend coherentism systematically. This position that knowledge has no foundations harmonises with the metaphysical account on which ontology has no foundations. Candrakīrti takes this idea further, defending quite explicitly the Nyāya pramāṇas as accounts of conventional epistemic practices, but arguing that contrary to Nyāyika epistemology, they have no *foundational* role.

The prāsaṇgika commitments are clear: conventional reality must be taken seriously, as must conventional epistemic practices. Conventional epistemic practices include the use of reason and of logic. But none of that requires *boring logic*, or a *boring* account of rationality. The appeal of Prāsaṇgika Madhyamaka is not that foundationalism is rejected in a grand and indiscriminate farewell to reason, or that one set of foundations is rejected in favour of another. The first would be as inefficacious as the second would be pedestrian, as Nāgārjuna emphasizes in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* XXIV:10.[23] Rather the appeal of Prāsaṇgika consists in the fact that it gives us *good reasons* to reject foundationalism, and in the fact that it shows us how we can be dialectically and soteriologically effective and rational even when, and in fact only once, foundations are abandoned. Its radicalism consists in its detachment of rationality from foundationalism, not in its rejection of rationality, *tout court*.

As Huntington himself realizes, and as I have been at pains to argue for some years, the deepest and most radical idea advanced by Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti is the idea that Madhyamaka is the rejection of *all* views. I *agree* with Huntington that Candrakīrti saw Bhāvaviveka's central error to be a failure to appreciate the import of this idea, and I even agree with Huntington that Tsong kha pa fails to appreciate this idea fully, and ends up taming Nāgārjuna a bit too much, adding the qualifier "inherently existent" to each occurrence. But once again, Huntington goes too far in his reading, and hence not far enough philosophically. As a consequence, Huntington sees Nāgārjuna as rejecting philosophical analysis entirely, hence abandoning his own corpus. We, on the other hand, show that he is positionless in a sense of great moment to philosophy, thus giving point to that corpus.

As Hayes (1994) and I have each pointed out, a lot hangs on the ambiguity between *dṛṣṭi* and *darśana* in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā*, (Garfield 1995, 2002) and on the sense of *pratijnā* in *Vigrahavyāvartanī.* (2002) Nāgārjuna argues that anyone for whom *śunyatā* becomes a *dṛṣṭi* is hopeless, not that one should not achieve *śunyatā–darśana.* And he argues for the claim that he has no *pratijnā in the context of a debate about semantics* in *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, in which the Nyāya purvapakṣa charges that Nāgārjuna's conventionalist understanding of linguistic meaning leaves him unable to attach any meaning to his own assertions. Nāgārjuna is concerned to defend the idea that all phenomena are empty of inherent existence—that there is no fundamental nature of reality. And he means it. He *does*

[23] Without depending on the conventional truth,
The meaning of the ultimate cannot be taught.
Without understanding the meaning of the ultimate,
Nirvana cannot be achieved.

say this, again and again, and he argues for it. As Candrakīrti points out in his colourful examples of the shopkeeper and of the laxative, Nāgārjuna in his insistence that Madhyamaka not be taken as one more *dṛṣṭi* is emphasizing that this really is the rejection of *any* view regarding the fundamental nature of reality: saying that everything is empty is not to replace one account of the fundamental nature of reality with another; it really is to deny that there is any. And the same goes for the final verse in *Mūlamadhyamakakārikā* to which Huntington adverts, and which I have argued must be taken very seriously (1995). Madhyamaka is the end of objectification, not the objectification of emptiness.

When Huntington asks us to take Nāgārjuna at his word, I agree that we should. But words are words in context, and Huntington rips the verses on which he relies out of their context. In *Vigrahavyāvartanī*, Nāgārjuna never denies that he asserts sentences, never denies that his words are meaningful, and never recants his Madhyamaka account. All he denies is that his words are meaningful *in virtue of constituting the assertion of a pratijñā*, a *proposition* that explains their meaning. And this is important. For were he to follow the purvapakṣa down the proto-Fregean road of positing a language-independent proposition about which they disagree, he would end up accepting essences. (See 2002, c 3)

Instead, Nāgārjuna affirms the deep and original philosophical position (not to be discovered in the West until Heidegger and Wittgenstein defended it) that linguistic meaning can only be conventional. This permits Nāgārjuna to prosecute a philosophical project that indeed undermines any attempt to take it as fundamental ontology, but does not undermine *itself*. It allows him *cogently* not only to refute his opponents, but to *defend* his own account of emptiness, to do so without taking emptiness to be a view about the nature of reality, and to do so without committing himself to a philosophy of language or epistemology antithetical to the account he defends so adroitly, so rationally.

All of this connects with another issue that allows us to see what Candrakīrti has in mind when he disavows *svātantra* argument. He is in *this* context, of course, addressing Bhāvaviveka, who, as Huntington notes, is applying Dignāga's account of formal argument to a reconstruction of Nāgārjuna's text. Central to this model of formal argument is the idea that argument requires a *subject (chos can)*, what we in the west would call a "major term," that is the basis of predication: A *POT* is impermanent, because *IT* is produced. Now, on this account of argument, the two parties to the debate must begin with a common understanding of what this subject is, or the argument can't get off the ground.[24] When Candrakīrti urges that this form of argument must be rejected, it is on the grounds that the mādhyamika and the essentialist have such different initial conceptions of what it is to be a pot, or of anything that could serve as the subject of an argument for its emptiness, that they can't begin to debate. All that the mādhyamika can do in a circumstance of such profound ontological difference is to start with the essentialist's understanding and show that *that* understanding is incoherent.

But Candrakīrti *argues for this position*, and does so at great length. So he doesn't eschew *argument*, or reason in defending prāsaṇgika methodology and in

[24] That is, it must be a *chos can mthun snang.*

connecting it deeply to Madhyamaka ontology, but rather, in this context, a particular *model* of what argument must be. This connects deeply to another understanding of what it is for a mādhyamika to have no thesis. For *pakṣa* is also a technical term referring to the conclusion of a Dignāga-style formal argument. And it is in virtue of denying the probity of *such* an argument as a defence of Madhyamaka doctrine, Candrakīrti emphasizes that the mādhyamika has no *pakṣa.* But it does not follow that the mādhyamika has no position of *any* kind, or endorses no arguments of *any* kind.

This reading takes Nāgārjuna to be positionless—to refuse to endorse any thesis in virtue of being the conclusion of a classical formal argument, to reject all views—in virtue have rejecting the very idea of a fundamental nature of reality. It takes him at his word, and it takes his words in context. But it does not, as does Huntington's account, trivialize him as an irrationalist who simply takes no position or holds no view in virtue of recusing himself from intellectual inquiry.

It takes him to be positionless and to reject all views in a sense at the same time more rational and more radical. For Huntington takes rationality and essentialism to go hand in hand. Nāgārjuna sees that they must come apart. The rational position is the anti-essentialist position. The essentialist who thinks that his view is rationally defensible is defeated, and defeated by reason. Nāgārjuna's position stands up to analysis not because it evades argument, but because it emerges as the inescapable consequence of any rational analysis.

This keeps us on Candrakīrti's side. Being irrational is cheap, and takes one nowhere, or anywhere. To be truly radical is to be rationally radical. We follow Nāgārjuna and Candrakīrti as guides down the chariot path of rational inquiry to the city of liberation. Huntington we leave to wander, bereft of reason, aimless and alone in the trackless wilderness of saṃsara.

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